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THE EXPERIENCE OF THAI WOMEN IN THAI-CANADIAN MARRIAGES

by

ORAPIN STIRAMON

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1995

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experience of Thai women engaged in Thai-Canadian cross-national marriages. The investigation is exploratory and descriptive in nature. Nine women participated in the study. The researcher used individual interviews to collect data, and looked for themes and issues common to the women studied. The interviews were conducted entirely in the Thai language in order to allow the participants to share their experiences freely. Three developmental stages of the women's experience arose from the data. These were (1) contemplating marriage, (2) adjusting to marriage, and (3) reflecting on one's marriage and needs. Within each of the three stages a major theme emerged: finding a good husband, carrying on the marriage, and considering options. Several topics related to these themes were also identified in the study. The data are discussed in relation to developmental, symbolic interaction, and social exchange theories. Implications for counselling and suggestions for further research conclude the dissertation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Despite social and sometimes legal sanctions against the practice, marriages between people from diverse cultural, racial, or religious backgrounds have occurred throughout history (Cottrell, 1990; Gordon, 1964; Ritnimit, 1985). The growing number of intermarriages in this century, particularly noticeable in multicultural societies like Canada and the United States, is largely due to the increasing permeability of national, ethnic and religious boundaries in response to technological developments in transportation and telecommunication networks. The penetration of these boundaries has led to increased contact and understanding among various groups, and ultimately, to the relaxation of sanctions against intermarriage.

It is not surprising that social scientists have become interested in intermarriage, given the peculiar challenges such relationships must present and the tremendous insight into cultural adaptation to be gained (Cottrell, 1990). Indeed, studies of the phenomenon were conducted as early as the 1930's (Smith, 1971). Most of these studies have been English or American and very few have studied marriages involving Thai women. Contact between Thailand and North America is increasing, however, and so are marriages between their peoples. A study of the Thai-Canadian cross-national marriage is one that has never been done and one that is

clearly warranted by the increasing numbers of such marriages.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of Thai women who married Canadian men and who were residents of Alberta. Specifically, the study sought to discover how these women were doing in their marriages and what experiences and perceptions were common among them.

Rationale for the Study

The motivation to undertake this study grew from my background as a Thai psychologist and educator and my experience living in Canada as a foreign student. While pursuing my doctoral studies, I had access to a number of people involved in Thai-Canadian cross-national marriages. Naturally, I was interested in the dynamics within these relationships. The focus on the experience of Thai women in such relationships developed as a result of a pilot study which determined that this narrow focus would provide sufficient information for a study of this scope. In addition, the fact that I felt I could develop a good rapport with the Thai women, being one myself, and could communicate with them in their mother tongue, helped to decide the focus. The research was meant to be exploratory in nature. I tried to approach the issue without assumptions

except the assumption that the results might have important implications for those interested in Thai-Canadian cross-national marriage and for those working in the area of cross-national marriage counselling. I share the concern among mental health professionals that it is essential to be more aware of the need for culturally relevant therapy and counselling (Levine & Padilla, 1980; Pedersen, 1985; Sue & Sue, 1990; Wolfgang, 1985; Westwood, 1983). In terms of marital family therapy in particular, McGoldrick (1982) points out that it is the clinician's role in cross-cultural counselling or therapy to be the cultural broker and to help the couples or families to recognize their own ethnic values in order to resolve the conflicts related to differences in perceptions and experiences. This author also suggests that "the best approach is probably for clinicians to focus on a few groups with whom they have considerable exposure as a way of training themselves to be more aware of the cultural relativity of all norms and values" (p. 26). Specifically, there is a need for the counsellor to "develop particular skills for working with clients who are either racially or culturally dissimilar from the counsellor" (Westwood, 1983, p. 62). This becomes a more apparent challenge in Canadian society because of its commitment to multiculturalism (Westwood, 1983; Wolfgang, 1985).

The history of Canada's development, beginning with the confrontational meeting of three distinct peoples and

followed two centuries later by mass immigration from every corner of the globe (Richard, 1991), has made the country a perfect laboratory for experiments in intermarriage. As one might expect, Canadian research has revealed a trend toward increasing intermarriage in Canada as a whole, as well as in individual provinces (Goldstein & Segall, 1984; Statistics Canada, 1984, 1989, 1994). Furthermore, it appears that "Canadian attitudes toward ethnic intermarriage have become increasingly favourable" (Goldstein & Segall, 1984). In 1984, Statistics Canada reported that nearly one Canadian in ten indicated a multiple ethnic origin. By 1986, the figures had increased to nearly three Canadians in ten and had risen by another tenth of a percent by 1991 (Statistics Canada, 1989, 1994). Despite this trend, there are still gaps in the research literature on intermarriage because most studies on intergroup marriages in Canada have focused on either English-French couples or interreligious marriages, and not on cross-national marriages (cf. Goldstein & Segall, 1984; Castonquay, 1982; Larson & Munro, 1985). To date, no study on intermarriage has examined the present trend toward cross-national marriage between Canadians and Thais. This study was undertaken to fill the void that clearly existed in the research literature.

Scope of the Study

This research was confined to studying only Thai women

who were involved in cross-national marriages with Canadian men, and who were living in Alberta, Canada. It included Thai women married, or previously married, to a Canadian man.

Significance of the Study

Since this study is the first attempt to understand the experiences of Thai women in cross-national marriages with Canadian men, the findings will add to the research data base that is directed at cross-national marriages between Asians and Caucasians. In addition, the results of this study should make a contribution to the area of cross-cultural marriage counselling. The data should also reveal a part of the Canadian multi-cultural mosaic which has been either unknown or neglected. Finally, this study will result in suggestions and recommendations for further research.

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of the key terms used in this study:

1. Intramarriage

Intramarriage refers to a marriage between persons coming from the same background.

2. Intermarriage/Intergroup marriage

Intermarriage or intergroup marriage refers to a mixed marriage involving partners from two different religious,

cultural, or racial backgrounds, or from two different countries.

3. Interracial/Interethnic marriage

These terms are used differently by different authors, many of whom have been cited in this study. Sometimes the terms are synonymous, referring to marriages between people from different racial groups--that is, people with different skin color. However, some writers use the term "ethnic" to refer to culture and/or nationality. Where these terms are used in this study, their meanings will be clarified by the context in which they are employed.

4. Interfaith marriage

An interfaith marriage is one involving people of different religious or denominational backgrounds.

5. Intercultural marriage/Cross-cultural marriage

A marriage is intercultural or cross-cultural when it involves partners from different cultural backgrounds.

6. International marriage/Cross-national marriage

These synonymous terms refer to marriages involving partners who are citizens of different countries.

7. Thai women

These are women who were born in Thailand and had Thai citizenship before getting married.

8. Canadian men

For the purpose of this study, Canadian men are male caucasians who hold bona fide Canadian citizenship.

9. *Farang*

This is a Thai word to refer to "a Caucasian."

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce some of the theoretical and empirical information written on the topic of marriage in general, and intermarriage in particular. This overview is meant to deepen the reader's comprehension of the Thai women's experiences in Thai-Canadian marriages presented in this dissertation. In order to fulfill this purpose, this chapter has been organized into two sections: marriage and intermarriage. The first section attempts to distinguish between the fundamental concept of marriage in the East and its counterpart in the West, and also to provide a very general understanding of three widely held theoretical perspectives on marriage. The second section looks at intermarriage and research on cross-national marriages. It also includes the problems engendered by cross-national marriages, and the factors for success and adjustment for this type of marriage.

Section One: Concepts of Marriage

Marriage can be described as a constantly changing institution (Brubaker, 1992; Collins, 1988). Historically, marriage in all societies, was primarily arranged for practical reasons, whether political, biological, economic, or otherwise. In recent times, practicality has been giving way to romantic love and companionship, and modern marriage

is now more a matter of fulfilling personal needs. The trend towards equity between men and women calls for egalitarian marriages (where partners share power and responsibility) to replace traditional marriages characterized by powerful male breadwinners and subservient female homemakers. Reseachers have noted an ongoing shift from traditional marriage to egalitarian marriage in every part of the world where urbanization and Westernization are occurring. The only real difference between the changes in each society is the speed at which they are taking place (Brubaker, 1992; Cherlin & Chamratrithirong, 1987; Collins, 1988; Mace & Mace, 1960). One consequence of this shift in the nature of marriage is that people are now choosing the type of marriage that suits them best. Despite the national norms, the fact is that most marriages in any given society today fall somewhere on a continuum between the extremes of the completely traditional and the completely egalitarian (Adler, 1991; Collins, 1988).

East vs. West

Marriage patterns in the East are based on a patriarchial system in which the male has been ascribed superior status (Adler, 1991; Mace & Mace, 1960). The division of labor in the home between married couples is clear cut and congruent with socialized gender roles. Although husbands are no longer always the sole providers, the traditional belief that the man is the head of the

household is still widely held in Asian societies. Moreover, practical necessity, moral commitment, and community opinion are still common reasons for entering and maintaining marriages in Asian countries (Adler, 1991; Mace & Mace, 1960). The East has traditionally given less importance to intimate relations between husband and wife than to their obligations to their family and society (Mace & Mace, 1960). Because husbands and wives cooperate in labor division and have their individual spheres, marriage in the East is most often categorized as "utilitarian."

In the West, traditional roles in marriage have been redefined. The male-dominant model is being replaced by a relationship based on equal partnership. Dual-earning and role sharing has become typical of marriage in the West (Adler, 1991; Collins, 1988). The motivation for marriage has also changed. "Intrinsic marriage," in which each partner depends largely on the other's presence, both physically and psychologically (Saxton, 1982), is now the ideal in Western countries. Love is the primary reason for marrying in the West and intense intimacy is expected in the marriage (Mace & Mace, 1960; Saxton, 1982).

However, this does not mean that utilitarian marriages no longer exist in the West, nor that intrinsic marriages do not occur in the East. The Cuber and Harroff study (1965) shows that, despite the popular view that most American marriages at that time were intrinsic ones, the majority of

couples in the study were involved in utilitarian marriages. Furthermore, Mace and Mace (1960) point out that the West's view of Eastern marriages as loveless ones is a misperception. In the past, love was not a necessary prelude to marriage in the East, but it was usually expected to be established eventually; and, in fact, the concept of love and companionship as a reason for marriage is now being widely adopted in the East (Adler, 1991; Rho, 1989).

Theoretical Views of Marriage

Marriage, like other human activities, is extremely variable and complex. Consequently, it is difficult to completely understand it from just one point of view, or using one theoretical approach. Researchers from the disciplines of psychology, sociology and anthropology have used a variety of conceptual frameworks to create an understanding of the institution of marriage. Nevertheless, no single theory is able to provide a whole picture of marriage. Since it would be impossible to present a comprehensive review of marriage theory here, a brief overview of three important theoretical perspectives is offered to provide a context in which to place the results of this study.

1. Developmental Theories

According to Western developmental theorists, marriages generally follow a predictable cycle. As many as eight

stages have been identified in the cycle. These stages are accompanied by different tasks that couples have to accomplish (Duvall & Miller, 1985). During the first stage, the newly married couple must establish a household, take responsibility to maintain the household, and develop a marital bond involving committment. In the second stage, the couple begins to produce children (the oldest child being less than 30 months). From this stage through to the sixth stage, in which the children leave home, the couple must adjust to their roles as parents. The family with preschoolers (the oldest child being two-and-a-half to six years old) is in stage three and moves to stage four when the children start school (the oldest child being six to thirteen years old). The family in stage five has teenagers living at home (the oldest child being 13 to 20 years old). Stage six lasts from the time the first child leaves home until the last child is gone. From the time of the empty nest until retirement, the couple is in stage seven, and must refocus on their marital relationship while maintaining ties with older and younger generations of relatives. In the final stage from retirement until the death of a spouse, the couple must adapt to retirement, aging, closing the family home, and finally, bereavement.

Marital satisfaction appears to vary over the life span. Blood and Wolfe (1960) conducted a cross-sectional study of 731 urban and suburban wives, and with 178 farm

wives. They reported that marital satisfaction decreased slowly over the life span. The data indicated that marriages typically began with a honeymoon period that lasted for a few years. In the first two years of marriage, 52 percent of the wives studied were very satisified with their marriages. Satisfaction with standard of living and companionship then declined with the birth of the first child. If children did not come, their absence was an alternative source of dissatisfaction. For those who were married for twenty years, only 6 percent were still very satisfied and 21 percent were dissatisfied (pp. 87-88). In contrast, Rollins and Feldman (1970) suggest that the curve of marital satisfaction over time follows a U shape. In their study, satisfaction was highest in newlyweds, declined with the coming of children, and turned up again when the children left home. On the other hand, Skolnick (1978) found that no such pattern emerged from her own studies at the Institute of Human Development. Slightly more than half of the spouses in her longitudinal study maintained the same range of marital satisfaction. The remaining group had marked changes in marital satisfaction occurring in both directions. Skolnick further points out that the marriage life cycle has changed dramatically in recent years. Spouses now have more years alone together due to the fact that they live longer and do not have as many children. Thus, the personal relationship between spouses has become an important part of

modern marriage and this may have an effect on the level of satisfaction in marriage. Gullotta, Adams and Alexander (1986) conclude that communication, commitment, age, and years of marriage largely account for the changes in marital satisfaction over time.

Another kind of developmental theory is that which explores human psychosexual and psychosocial development. Theorists who believe in the importance of complementary qualities between the two genders view that it is essential for men and women to give to each other and receive from one another, psychologically. Marriage is viewed as a complementary process between men and women. This idea fits with Freud's theory that heterosexuality is the final stage of human psychosexual development. Erikson (1963) saw one's capacity to make a commitment in an intimate relationship as one of the critical developmental tasks in the life of each individual. However, scholars on the development of the female life span (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976) argue that both Freud and Erikson fail to provide an accurate female developmental stage. Gilligan (1982) points out that Erikson's theory of psychosocial development fails to acknowledge women's experience with respect to the following three stages: identity, intimacy, and generativity. She explains that while the discovery of one's identity through individuation precedes intimacy and generativity for men, these three stages seem to be

undifferentiated for women. Women, according to Gilligan, develop identity and morality through nurturance and caring. Similarly, Miller (1976, 1991) proposed "a being-in-relationship model" (1991, p. 21), which suggests that women's sense of self is organized around building and maintaining their relationships with others.

2. Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction theorists claim that the relations among people are based on their shared understanding and interpretation of given symbols or situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). From this perspective, the socialization process is a key element, and, for many people, marriage is as important aspect of self-validation (Turner, 1970). People marry because they have learned about family structure since early childhood. They learn that marriage is expected when they reach maturity and that marriages imply normality, morality, and prestige (Turner, 1970). Because the meaning of marriage and other symbols vary from culture to culture, it is a logical extrapolation to suggest that intermarried couples ought to expect greater difficulties in their marriages than intramarried ones. Couples are required to agree upon a code of symbols in order to interact and relate to one another in meaningful ways. Many of the problems in a marriage are caused by spouses interpreting symbols in different ways, not only because of differing social backgrounds, but also because of gender differences.

Jessie Bernard (1982), a scholar in the field of marriage studies, points out that research on marriage has found inconsistent perceptions between husbands and wives with respect to their marital satisfaction and domestic duties, and that a single marriage evidently contains within it two very different perspectives, namely, his and hers. Gender accounts for how each partner constructs his or her reality about the marriage.

3. Social Exchange Theory

Adherents of this approach see marriage in the same context as any other interpersonal relationship in which each individual's needs must be met if the relationship is to survive. In a marriage, each person wants something from the other, and the exchange process is governed by economic principles (Coleman, 1984). Each spouse brings something to contribute to the relationship, including money, information, goods, services, status, and love (Foa & Foa, 1980). Scanzoni (1972) emphasizes that the bargaining process occurs prior to and throughout the marriage. Both partners attempt to bargain for the most benefits they can attain. Thus, when "costs" do not have reciprocal "rewards," partners must then decide whether or not pursuing the relationship is worthwhile (Coleman, 1984). However, there are several opinions regarding the power to bargain in the relationship. Feminist theorists believe that women have less power to bargain because they are limited by sexual,

economic and politic oppression (Jaggar & Struhl, 1978). Others argue that women, in fact, possess emotional skills that give them more power in terms of familial relationships (Goldberg, 1993).

Section Two: Intermarriage

The phenomenon of intermarriage has drawn attention from academics since the early 1900's. Theorists in the fields of psychology and anthro-sociology (Cottrell, 1990; Ibrahim & Schroeder, 1990; McGoldrick, 1982; Steinberg, 1981) view the study of intermarriage as important at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, this type of research leads to the understanding of marginality, acculturation, and cultural change. At the micro level, research permits professionals to gain an understanding of the nature and the dynamics of interpersonal adaptation (Cottrell, 1990). In the field of anthro-sociology, published research findings have three main foci: causal factors, patterns of incidence and mate selection, and consequences of intermarriage for couples and their children (e.g. Cottrell, 1971, 1972, 1978; Gordon, 1964; Hall, 1980). On the other hand, in psychology, the research focuses on marital satisfaction and the problems and adjustments in intermarriage (e.g. Jones, 1972; Lin, 1990; Romano, 1988; Tseng, Mcdermott & Maretzki, 1977).

Research on cross-national marriage did not begin until

the 1950's (Cottrell, 1990, Smith, 1971) and the main stream of research has been emanating from the United States, where cross-national marriage research was a social issue after World War II. The increasing numbers of foreign students (mainly male students who found a bride in the host country) is also a compounding factor that has led to research on cross-national marriage (Cottrell, 1990, Smith, 1971).

Cottrell (1990) reviewed 33 studies on cross-national marriage conducted between 1950 and 1980, and concluded that the body of literature falls short of representing the global phenomenon of cross-national marriage. This author has extracted three main themes: (1) war bride/colonizer marriages, in which the majority of the studies are concerned with American soldiers and their Asian wives; (2) educated Western-non Western marriage, in which most cases are concerned with the Western wives of the non-Western husbands; and (3) educated Western-Western marriages, in which most of the cases are Europeans who married American women. Cottrell (1990) also pointed out several weaknesses in the literature on cross-national marriage: first, many themes introduced in these studies may not be applicable to cross-national marriages today because of the historical and social context; second, limitations in identifying and locating the population in question often led to small and non-random samples; third, descriptions were limited and focused only on the experiences of foreign wives; moreover,

couple centredness often resulted in a failure to consider their social networks and larger social environment, such as relations with family and friends; the predominantly American and English research base may also have contributed to a misconception that only these two countries have a large number of intermarried couples; furthermore, research was problem oriented, yet rarely investigated whether the problems were critical to the couple; finally, these findings have limited generalizability to cultures other than American or Western, and to periods of time other than the late 20th century (p.158-p.162).

Although there have been studies related to Asian-Western intermarriage, these studies concentrate mainly on marriages between either Japanese, Chinese, or Koreans, and Americans (e.g., DeVos, 1973; Jones, 1972; Lee & Yamanaka, 1990; Ratliff, Moon, & Bonacci, 1978; Tseng, McDermott, & Maretzki, 1977). Some later studies focus on Filipino brides of Australian men (Chuah, Chuah, Smith & Rice, 1987). It should be noted that the shift from concentrating on war brides to Asian mail-order brides reflects the current historical and social context; namely, that intermarriage through correspondence agencies has become a new aspect of the cross-national marriage phenomenon (Lin, 1990).

A thorough literature review failed to produce even a single study focusing on Thai-Canadian cross-national marriages. Only five studies have been reported in the

professional literature that focused on Thai-American intermarriage (Kambhu, 1963; Kitivipart, 1987; Lin, 1990; Ritnimit, 1985; Smith, 1971). The focus of the two earlier studies, Kambhu (1963) and Smith (1971), were on American women who married Thai men in the United States but lived in Thailand. Ritnitmit's (1985) work deals with pastoral counselling for the intermarried couple and includes some Thai-American couples. Kitivipart's (1987) study concentrates on aspects of communication and interaction styles of Thai-American couples residing in the United States. Finally, Lin's (1990) study looks at marital satisfaction in intercultural correspondence marriage, and also includes Thai-American couples.

Problems Related to Cross-National Marriages

Cross-national marriages demand that at least one partner change place of residency. Thus, the partner who immigrates must face the problems that any immigrant confronts in the foreign country, in addition to problems in the marriage itself. These include learning the new language, adjusting to all amenities, and understanding the new customs and values. Researchers have also found that spouses who emigrate may experience drastic changes in their partners (Kambhu, 1963). The literature suggests that "adapting is easier when the couple lives in the wife's country. . .[because she will have] the cultural and social

resources to fulfil her primary roles as wife and mother" (Cottrell, 1990, p. 164; Immamura, 1990; Kambhu, 1963).

Besides the fact that the spouse who emigrates needs to adjust to a new environment, he or she will also be faced with many potential sources of conflict in the marriage, which "vary according to the partners' personalities, the social context of their marriage, and the state of their marital relationship" (Coleman, 1984, p. 376). Researchers have found that the most important sources of conflict in any marriage are "unmet needs and expectations, money, sex, power, roles and responsibilities, jealousy, and extramarital affairs" (Coleman, 1984, p. 376). In the cross-national marriage (and also other kinds of intermarriage), a number of additional issues may arise because the partners are required to make adjustments to many aspects of their lives, including values, communication, friends, finances, child rearing, and dealing with stress (Giladi, 1986; Markoff, 1977; Romano, 1988; Zuckerwise, 1991).

Differences in values can be a source of problems not only because the couple have different cultures, but also because they tend to feel that their particular culture is the best (Romano, 1988). Also, stereotypes and prejudices relating to the partner's ethnic group or country may not be conscious, but may still affect the marital relationship, since one partner views and treats the other as a representative of his or her own group or country (Markoff,

1977). In addition, different values can be the underlying cause of the couple's disagreement on food and drink, time spent on social activities, religion, and so on.

Besides the problem of differences in values, communication is an important aspect of a marriage that the cross-national married couple needs to deal with. A successful marriage demands good communication, both verbal and nonverbal (Kitivipart, 1987). Failure to understand or communicate thoughts and feelings isolates the partners and can lead to discord between the couple in other areas. For example, couples need to agree on daily activities, such as what kind of meal to prepare, how, when, and where to serve the main meal, how it is eaten, and who cooks or does the dishes. Unless all these issues are resolved, they become an irritant to the couple and may result in marital dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the couple needs to have good communication about each other's issues, such as gender roles and sex (Imamura, 1986; Ritnimit, 1985).

Friendship is valued by all societies, but each culture defines it differently and has different expectations of it (Romano, 1988). For those involved in cross-national marriages, friends can be important persons to consult on problems, and to help vent stress in difficult times (Immamura, 1990; Kambhu, 1963). Also, having social activities with friends helps the cross-national couple not to be tied up with each other all the time. Through the

spouse's friends, each member of the marriage may learn about the other's society, the place they live, social rules of the culture, and something of their spouse's personality and background. On the other hand, lack of understanding of the spouse's concept of friendship may create problems with the spouse's friends which can lead the couple to uncomfortable situations and disagreements (Kambhu, 1963). These issues may also relate to problems of communication and differences in values.

Another important issue in cross-national marriages is the resolution of financial problems (Chuah et al., 1987). This issue is one of the major causes of conflicts in any marriage, but it is usually more difficult in an intermarriage because it relates to differences in values, the issue of gender roles, and in-laws (Romano, 1988). For example, the couple may have different opinions on what to do with their money, who should be responsible for earning money, what should be the priority budget items, and what type of financial support should be given to their families of origin and to their in-laws.

Child-rearing is another potential problematic issue in cross-national marriages (Ritnimit, 1985). Differences in philosophy, values, beliefs, and traditions may be the basis of conflict when it comes to child rearing. The couple may disagree on child rearing practices from the moment the wife becomes pregnant, or the child is born, until he or she

grows up. What religion, for example, should the child have? What language should be taught? What should the child's name be? Should the mother breast feed? What kinds of punishment are appropriate and to what extent?

Another issue that an intermarried couple must face is dealing with stress (Romano, 1988). One partner may not understand the way the other deals with stress, illness, and suffering, and this can ultimately result in conflicts. Failure to respond in the way that the spouse expects can lead to confusion and restlessness in the relationship.

Factors for Success and Adjustment

Romano (1988) points out that the success or failure in adjustment in an intermarriage depends on the couple's characteristics; namely, good motives for the marriage, common goals, sensitivity to each other's needs, a liking for the other's culture, flexibility, a positive self-image, a spirit of adventure, the ability to communicate, a commitment to the relationship, and a sense of humour. It is unlikely that a couple will have all these qualities, but success can be achieved as long as enough of them are present. According to Romano (1988), "few of the couples could claim to have all the[se] factors going for them, but the more successful couples had enough of them to keep their marriages on a solid footing while they worked on the others." (p.126)

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to enable readers to "audit" or follow the research process. The chapter is organized in two 2 parts. The first part, entitled preliminary considerations, explains the choice of research method and the ethical considerations regarding human research. It also provides information regarding a pilot study that was conducted. The second part presents a clear description of the research procedures employed, including the selection and description of participants, collection and analysis of data, and strategies used for achieving trustworthiness of the study.

Preliminary Considerations

Choice of Research Method

To understand the nature and meaning of the experiences of Thai women in Thai-Canadian marriages, I decided that a qualitative inquiry would be an appropriate research approach. Despite my previous clinical training, which emphasized the quantitative approach, I have come to believe that some lived events are not easily addressed by quantitative methods (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Quantitative data alone can not provide a complete understanding of every subject. Where a particular human experience is the topic of investigation, qualitative

methods can often provide a richness of understanding not exposed by quantitative inquiry.

Another important reason for using a qualitative approach is that it allows the researcher to explore a field in which little or no previous work has been done (Patton, 1990). Because very little was known about Thai-Canadian marriages, the use of a qualitative method seemed to be a reasonable way to begin investigating this area where no definitive hypotheses exist. The study, therefore, is phenomenological in its underlying philosophy. It is exploratory and descriptive.

I also reasoned that this research method would allow me to rely on my skills as a clinician and enhance them by disciplining myself to truly listen to the women studied. My goals were to be receptive to all findings, and not to overlook or reject unexpected, but useful, information (Borg & Gall, 1983). I expected that this approach would yield new knowledge as well as highlight ideas for further research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1990).

Ethical Considerations Regarding Human Research

The Research and Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta granted ethical clearance for this project. The objective of the committee was to make certain that the study met the ethical quidelines of the University for

conducting research. The issue of concern in their review was sensitivity to the participants in the study, especially with respect to confidentiality, anonymity, and the protection of their rights.

I made it clear to participants that they were not required to discuss anything about which they felt uncomfortable. The information which they provided was treated as privileged, to be used for research purposes only. I made every attempt to avoid any discussion that could identify participants or their individual personal problems. I personally transcribed and translated all interviews to avoid using assistants from the Thai community in Alberta who might have knowledge of participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' anonymity. The content of the thesis excluded identifying materials as much as possible.

The Pilot Study

A pilot study was initially conducted to determine the most effective strategy with which to approach the research, to develop an interview guide for the main investigation, and to decide whether or not husbands should be included as participants.

I spent two weeks talking with Thai-Canadian couples in Duncan, British Columbia. I deliberately left Alberta to do the pilot study so that this preliminary work would not

affect the small pool of candidates in Alberta from which I might have to choose participants for the main study. There were two Canadian men and three Thai women in this pilot study. Both of the Canadian men had obtained a university degree. Two of the Thai women had college diplomas, and the other woman had little education before emigrating to Canada. English was used as the language of communication when the husbands were interviewed. Thai was the language used when the wives were interviewed. Both Thai and English were used on one occasion when two couples were interviewed as a group. Both individual and group interview approaches were used in order to determine the most suitable approach for the main study. Selected questions were used depending on the interview situations. Basically, the questions were based upon the work of Devos (1973), McGoldrick (1982), Romano (1988), and Tseng, McDermott and Maretzki (1977).

During these interviews, I observed that the Thai women were reticent to speak freely when their husbands were present. In contrast, the Thai women expressed their experiences in greater detail when they were interviewed individually and when the Thai language was used. The Thai women brought forward many interesting and related issues about their cross-national marriages in casual conversations with me. For example, one woman talked about her wish to go back to Thailand and there were many factors that she had to consider before making the decision. Moreover, I sensed that

when questions addressed marital problems, the women felt somewhat uncomfortable about self-disclosure. Focusing on problems seemed to make them become more defensive. Despite the women's consent to the interview, the minimal rapport established in the interview period was not sufficient in terms of creating a relaxed atmosphere where the women could express their thoughts and feelings. Clearly, gaining participants' trust and preserving participants' personal integrity were major issues that had to be dealt with. It became evident that spending more time developing trust would lead to the women expressing themselves in greater depth.

Another major finding from this initial exploration was that a semi-structured individual interview would be more appropriate than a structured interview or a group approach. This finding was based on the fact that Thai women were very cautious about their responses when a formal interview technique was used, and appeared to keep responses more superficial in a group situation.

After completing the pilot study, I made four major decisions:

1) I chose to focus my study on Thai women's experiences in Thai-Canadian marriages. Specifically, I confined my research to the Thai wives of Canadian husbands in Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta, where I was working on my graduate studies and internship. This decision was made

because working in my province of residence would allow me to have more time to establish rapport with the participants before actually seeking their willingness to participate in the study.

2) I decided to conduct the interviews entirely in the Thai language in order to create an environment in which the participants would feel most comfortable.

3) I ruled out group interviews.

4) I chose the open-ended interview as the method for data collection so that the particants would have control of the information they disclosed. An interview guide was developed to help in collecting data for the study (see Appendix B).

Research Procedures

Selection of Participants

Participants were purposefully chosen (Field & Morse, 1985; Patton, 1990) in this study. I approached all participants either 1) through joining the cultural events arranged by the Alberta-Thai Association (both in Edmonton and in Calgary), such as New Year's Eve Parties; 2) through joining informal social functions arranged by individual Thais, such as pot-luck dinners; or 3) through friends and participants who knew that I was seeking additional individuals to participate in the study.

Initially, participants were selected on the basis of

their willingness and their ability to communicate their experience of the phenomenon being studied. As the study progressed and I met more potential participants, I focused on maximizing the range of information uncovered (Guba, 1981). This was accomplished by recruiting participants with a wide range of marital experiences (i.e. divorced or still married, satisfied or unsatisfied with married life), with varying lengths of time in the marriage and time living in Canada, and with varying numbers of children, levels of socioeconomic status, amounts of education, and regions of origin in Thailand (Bangkok, central, north, north-east, southern Thailand). The underlying reason for establishing these criteria was my belief that these conditions could have a significant impact on the experiences that the Thai women had in their marriages, and in their lives in Canada. Therefore, this diversity would enrich the findings.

Participants

Nine Thai women participated in this study. They were married to Canadian men and resided in either Edmonton or Calgary. Courtships of seven participants occurred in Thailand and the other two participants had their courtships in Canada. Eight of the nine participants were married at the time of the interview; one had been divorced for 10 years. The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 48 years old. The length of their marriages at the time of the

interviews ranged from 4 months to 10 years. The length of residency in Canada varied from 4 months to 11 years.

In some cases, residency in Canada did not correspond with marriage. For instance, one participant had been married to a Canadian for 10 years but had resided in Canada for only 4 months. Three participants each had two children. One participant had one child. The remaining participants were childless. The participants' self-described socioeconomic status prior to their marriages ranged from "poor to rich." The educational level of the participants ranged from one who had not completed grade four to one who had completed a Master's degree. Three participants were from Bangkok and central Thailand, four participants were from the north-east, and two participants were from southern Thailand. Eight participants were Buddhist and one was a Christian. The following table outlines the demographic information collected from the study group. Some details, such as ages and regions of origin, have been deliberately excluded for reasons of confidentiality.

Table 1:
Demographic Information on Participants

Participants (Pseudonym)	Courtship period	Years of marriage	Years of residency in Canada	Number of children
Dara	6 mths.	4 mths.	4 mths.	-
Jintana	1 mth.	6 yrs.	6 yrs.	2
Malee	5 yrs.	7 yrs.	10 yrs.	-
Nareerate	5 yrs.	2 yrs.	2 yrs.	-
Somjai	2 yrs.	10 yrs.	4 mths.	2
Suda	3 wks.	5 yrs.	5 yrs.	2
Tassana	<3 mths.	4 yrs.	11 yrs.	1
Witty	1 yr.	4 yrs.	4 yrs.	-
Worawan	3 yrs.	3 yrs.	3 yrs.	-

Data Collection

The data collection process took place between June, 1993 and July, 1994. After establishing some degree of informal familiarity with each participant, I informed the women either in person or through a telephone conversation about the research, and sought their willingness to participate in the study. During these conversations, I explained the general purpose of the study and the participants' role in the research. I also explained that a subsequent interview might be required. After each individual agreed to become a participant in the research, a mutual time when the interview could take place was established. In most cases, participants decided that the interview should take place in their homes when they were either alone or with their children. They also extended their generosity and friendship to me in Thai tradition by inviting me for lunch prior to the interview or to dinner

following the interview.

An informal conversation during the process of making lunch or preparing dinner together, prior to the interview, provided an opportunity for the participants to ask me questions regarding the research and my personal background, which in turn, fostered trust and openness. This process facilitated rapport that allowed me to ask questions during the interview that may have been otherwise considered to be threatening. It also lessened the participants' apprehension when I asked for permission to tape record their responses during the interview. I told the participants that the information on the audio tape would be transcribed from Thai to English, and that any information given would be considered privileged and used for research purposes only. I emphasized that the tape would be electronically erased when the research was concluded. Because of the closeness of the Thai community, participants were assured that the confidentiality of their personal information would be honoured. Participants were also made aware that they had the right and the privilege to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

At the beginning of each interview, a consent form (see Appendix A) was presented to the participant. I sought a signature before proceeding with the interview. I also informed each participant that both Thai and English transcripts would be made available to her if she wished to

review the transcripts or to engage in a validation process.

No time limit was set prior to an interview; the length of each interview depended on the participant's ability to articulate her experiences. The length of the interviews ranged from one-and-a-half hours to three-hours. All participants except one were interviewed only once. With this particular participant, her initial interview lasted three hours. Two months later, a subsequent interview lasted for two hours. The extra time taken for this participant was due only to her desire to share her experiences in great detail.

It is important to acknowledge that although I did not take a counsellor role, the interviews seemed to be therapeutic for some women.

In total, there were ten interviews from the nine participants.

"Research Instrument"

Those involved in human research are becoming more and more aware of the fact that the researcher's perspective can have a significant impact on a study (Giorgi, 1985). In qualitative research, especially, it is generally acknowledged that the researcher is a part of the research instrument (Patton, 1990). In this particular study, the other part of the instrument is the interview guide that was used.

A. The Researcher

I have had training in both Clinical psychology and Counselling psychology, which helped me to guide the interviews and to allow the participants to fully discuss their experiences. Quartaro (1986) points out that clinical training is very useful to researchers since they need to be able to pay close attention to the information being provided and to guide the interview. I was flexible and attempted to put aside any predetermined expectations. This contributed to the openness, depth, and detail of the information that the participants were willing to share.

Because I grew up in Thailand, most of the marriages to which I was exposed were of a traditional type. Sex roles in Thai marriages are more clearly divided than they are in the average Canadian marriage. Being a woman, I was naturally sensitive to the compromises that Thai women made for the sake of their marriages. I was also aware of the issue of female exploitation. Later on, as a foreign student in Canada, I was forced to recogize the difficulties involved with cultural adaptation.

These previous experiences led to me having the following biases which may have had some bearing on this study.

1. Despite (or perhaps because of) my cultural background, my personal preference is for a more egalitarian marriage based on a friendship between equally empowered

partners. I also believe, however, that couples must decide for themselves which type of marriage would suit them best, and that there are costs and benefits inherent in these choices.

2. I believe that women tend to make greater adjustments in marriage than men do.

3. I presumed that the women in the study would have had the same difficulties adjusting to Canadian culture that I had personally experienced. I expected, for example, to find that they were having or had had problems adjusting to the new language, the climate, the food, social interaction, and so on.

4. I have always been opposed to any form of female exploitation.

5. I have not been married so my personal conception of marriage is based solely on the experiences of others.

I managed to deal with most of my biases by becoming aware of them through discussion and writing. I also had my advisors read the initial interview transcripts to check for biased questions. In addition, participants were asked to check transcripts for accuracy of information.

B. The Interview Guide

The interview guide, which consisted of a series of open-ended questions, was used during the interview to collect data for analysis (see Appendix B). The first part

of the interview guide was comprised of questions to collect demographic data and general information about the participants. The second part consisted of the main questions exploring the participants' experiences in, perceptions of, and perspectives on their marriages. The third part was used to determine the participants' attitudes to their marriages and to Canada, and their expectations of both. The sequence in which the interview questions were asked was determined by the interview situation. Generally, at the beginning of an interview, open-ended questions were asked which provided the participants with an opportunity to address issues which were personally meaningful to them. The following are some examples of the main questions:

"What is it like for you as a Thai to be married to a Canadian?"

"How would you describe your marriage?"

"What do you need to deal with in your married life?"

Prior to ending an interview, I asked more direct questions to cover the areas that were not initially mentioned by participants. For example, the following questions were asked:

"You have not mentioned food and drink (or male-female roles, sex, friends, finances, in-laws, religion, raising children, language and communication, values, place of residence, etc.). Do you mind talking about these issues?"

"Who would you turn to when you have a disagreement with your spouse?"

These questions were used to determine whether certain topics were omitted in error, deliberately, or due to the fact that they were not a critical part of participant's experience. This allowed the participant to disclose experience related to that issue if she wished. I was also open to new information brought up by the participants.

I completed field notes on the same day of each interview, but not during the interview itself. I included the following foci in my field notes: 1) my thoughts towards the casual conversation that took place prior to the interview; 2) my comments on the overall interview process; 3) my impressions of participants' reactions to questions and of their emotional states; 4) my reflections on the interview guide; and 5) my thoughts about patterns of participants' responses.

As a result of writing and reviewing field notes from the initial interviews, I was able to develop criteria for recruiting successive participants, and to gain a sense of what was important to focus on in the successive interviews. For example, I saw the same pattern in two participants regarding food preferences and thought that their difficulties in adjusting to food might be influenced by their eating habits which were due to the region of Thailand from which they came. I began to look for more participants

that came from the North-east as well as other parts of Thailand. As another example, I gained a sense from the first participant that the issue of citizenship should be explored, although this question was not included on the interview guide. I began to question each participant at the end of the interview as to whether or not she held dual citizenship.

Preparation for Data Analysis

In preparing for the analysis of the data I collected, I transcribed each taped interview into Thai verbatim. To accomplish this, I used a dictaphone because of its playback capability which permitted the replaying of a given statement until all the words or phrases were deciphered. Each transcript was translated into English from Thai with an attempt to retain all the meaning of the interview.

To ensure accuracy of the translations, both the Thai and English transcriptions were made available to each participant who wished to review transcriptions of her interview. Each participant was invited to engage in the validation process of these transcripts, but no one was pressured to do so because I felt that process should not be a burden to a participant. Also, one participant had difficulty reading both Thai and English.

Of the nine participants, four engaged in the validation process. One requested a Thai transcription and

three asked for the English version. All four verified the accuracy of the transcripts. One participant asked to keep a copy of her Thai transcription, explaining that she wanted to keep it as a memento, and that it permitted her to be able to compare her thoughts at the time when she was interviewed with those she might have in the future.

Because English is not my primary language of communication, I felt it would be advantageous to have transcripts of the English translations edited for grammatical correctness and proper usage. Two English speakers were involved in the editing process for all ten transcriptions. Time was spent with these editors to discuss these transcriptions to make sure that the meaning of each interview was not altered. This process took place from September to November, 1994.

Analysis of Data

Several techniques suggested by various researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Field & Morse, 1985; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rennie, Phillips & Quartaro, 1988; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were selected as appropriate ways to guide the analysis of data for this research. The following steps were implemented:

1. I carefully read each interview transcript in its entirety so that I could develop a sense of the interview as

a whole.

2. Each sentence or series of sentences of the interview transcripts (Rennie, Phillips & Quartaro, 1988) which formed a data unit was given a label. Some data units were given more than one label. Labeled data units were then clustered into categories.

3. I used a cut method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) to assist in organizing materials. This entailed making extra copies of each transcript, noting interview numbers and page numbers in each coded segment of each transcript to avoid confusion and for quick referral. Each labeled data unit was then cut from the copied material and placed in appropriately labeled file folders.

The data yielded 30 categories. These 30 categories can be classified into two types: predetermined categories and emerged categories. Predetermined categories are those that were derived from data units of participants' responses that were directly related to a specific topic being explored. Emerged categories, on the other hand, pertain to data units that were unexpectedly offered by participants. For instance, I did not ask questions about how participants met their husbands and what made them decide to marry their husbands. However, it became apparent that important information about this subject was being offered. Therefore, "fear of being tricked" and "concerns about aging" were labeled and grouped under "issues before marrying." Another

example, "loneliness," was labeled and then became an emerged category by itself.

4. I examined categories for similarities and differences, looking for the commonalities in each category in terms of patterns and conditions. After regrouping several categories, major themes began to emerge. Drawing preliminary diagrams helped to develop and organize these themes, as well as the topics related to them. At the end of this process, I developed a single working diagram representing the common experiences of the nine women studied.

5. I set out to verify whether the working diagram accurately reflected the Thai women's experiences in Thai-Canadian marriages. I did this by requesting available participants and other Thai wives of Canadians (Field & Morse, 1985) to give comments on the diagram. I received confirmation of this diagram from two participants and from two other Thai wives of Canadian men who did not participate in the data collection process. Following this process, the working diagram was slightly modified. The final diagram appears in Figure 1.

6. Following the confirmation process, I made efforts to guard against my bias in writing descriptions of the women's experience and making interpretations. I used the working diagram as a guidepost, and constantly reflected on my writing and on the original data so that my descriptions

became a true reflection of the participants' experiences. The purpose of this was to ensure credibility of the study (Field & Morse, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

7. I commenced a secondary review of the literature as a final step in order to discuss the findings in the context of other research findings.

Trustworthiness of the Research Study

Trustworthiness is a global term which refers to validity and reliability in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers believe that the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is ensured when an "audit trail" is established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The following activities or techniques were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this study:

1. Carefully selecting participants and establishing rapport with them before conducting the interviews.
2. Using a tape recorder during the interview process, and a dictaphone to transcribe the recorded information.
3. Involving participants in the validation process to determine the accuracy of the transcripts.
4. Discussing changes with the editors to make sure that the editing process did not alter the content of the translated transcripts.
5. Checking the legitimacy of the working diagram with

participants, other Thai wives of Canadians, and dissertation committee members.

6. Providing details on language translation procedures in this chapter for the purpose of ensuring "audit trails" of the research procedure.

7. Providing details on the data analysis and writing up process, also in this chapter, and for the same purpose.

8. Using extensive quotes in presenting the findings in chapter four.

In summary, this chapter provides a description of the research process and procedures taken by the researcher to explore, analyze, and describe Thai women's experiences in Thai-Canadian marriages. The chapter to follow will present a collective description of the Thai women's experiences, and the diagram which captured the Thai women's experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a collective description of the nine Thai women's experiences in Thai-Canadian marriages. I have used verbatim quotations from the transcripts to support themes and patterns that arose from the interviews. Although each participant's story was unique, these women all appeared to have moved through or were moving through similar stages of adjustment: (1) contemplating marriage, (2) adjusting to marriage, and (3) reflecting on marriage and needs. These three stages correspond directly to the following three major themes that arose from analysis of the interviews: (a) finding a good husband, (b) carrying on the marriage, and (c) considering options. The main themes encompass several related topics which are also reviewed in this chapter.

Stage I. Contemplating Marriage

Major Theme: Finding a Good Husband

"Finding a good husband" was a common theme for the women before they entered their marriages. Each defined "a good husband" as a responsible man who loved her and was willing to take good care of her. Specifically, these women believed that the man should be a good provider, or at least the primary provider. The following two statements are typical of the women's views of their husbands before they

were married.

> My husband asked me to marry him and assured me that he would take care of me. (Suda)

> I thought that he was a responsible person and would be able to take care of me. (Nareerat)

Many of the women held the belief that Western men were trained to be responsible and would be better husbands than Thai men. They also believed that Canadian men would be faithful to their wives, and would spend more time with family than Thai men would. Three of the women clearly expressed the opinion that they married a Westerner because they did not want to deal with their husbands' infidelity, a common conflict existing in Thai marriages. Witty and Somjai, for example, made the following comments:

> I saw many of my cousins who seemed to love their wives dearly but went after prostitutes when they were drunk. . . .I believed that Western men would be faithful to their wives. They would have one wife at a time, not two women at the same time. (Witty)

> While I was seeing him [her husband], I also had a Thai boyfriend. I chose a *farang* because he would be a better family man in the long run. Also, he is wise and very responsible. I like this point the most. (Somjai)

Financial security and fidelity were not the only characteristics identified as essential in a good husband. Five of the nine women were looking primarily for men who could provide friendship, companionship, and romance. Both Malee's and Witty's statements illustrate this point:

> If you ask me whether I love my husband, I would say "yes". If I did not love him, I would not have married him. (Malee)

> I thought that I would never marry a guy who could not discuss things with me. . . .Also, I had the idea that Western men are more romantic than Thai men. (Witty)

Clearly, the women studied generally felt that finding a good husband was a major consideration while contemplating marriage, and that this had a significant impact on their decisions to marry foreigners. There were other things to consider, however. The two most important secondary considerations were the concern that their prospects for marriage were decreasing with age and the fear of being tricked into prostitution.

Concern About Decreasing Prospects for Marriage

Love, companionship and security were identified as the major reasons for marrying *farangs*. However, the concern that one was getting older appeared to be an issue for three women who were 28 years of age or older, and who had had no experience in intimate relationships. For instance, Malee shared her experience as follows:

> Another reason that I decided to marry my husband was because I was getting older. Most of my peers were married. I guess I wanted to be married. I wanted to know what married life was like. It might be woman's feeling. I wasn't scared that I would be an old maid. In my work place in Thailand, there were many old maids. But I think because of being a woman, I wanted to know about married life.

Tassana pointed out that in her case, availability played an important part in mate selection:

> My girlfriend introduced me to my husband who was a friend of her husband. At the time, I did not have much contact with other people and was in my thirties. (Tassana)

Three younger women who had had previous unsuccessful relationships were also concerned about their future prospects for marriage. Suda was one of these:

> It was difficult for me to be alone after breaking up with my previous boyfriend. . . .To be married was definitely better for me. However, I didn't have many guys to choose from.

Fear of Being Tricked Into Prostitution

For two women, Suda and Dara, the feelings of desperation and hopelessness for their futures were predominant before meeting their Canadian husbands in Thailand. Their feelings were rooted in their lack of job opportunities because of limited education, financial difficulty, and disappointment from previous relationships. Consequently, they ventured into marriages after short courtships with *farangs*, even though they were uncertain about the *farangs* they were considering marrying. Their concern was whether or not the men would trick them into prostitution. However, they based their decisions to marry on their hopes that what the men said or promised them would be true. The following statements illustrate this point:

> I was very scared that he might trick me to sell me. I thought that whatever would happen, would happen. I

> thought that I should give it a try because I really liked my husband a lot. We had been together for three weeks before marrying. When we were together, he made me feel warm and secure, and I felt he was a good person. . . .When I first came to Canada with my husband, I always felt scared when he took me out. I thought that he might take me somewhere, sell me, and leave me there. (Suda)

> At first, I was afraid that my husband might trick me and sell me. . . .I was afraid because I only knew my husband for a month. It was too short. (Dara)

These two women's reactions were not unusual given the prevalence of stories in Thailand about young girls and women who are forced to be sex slaves in the country or abroad, especially in Japan and Germany. Because these women had very short courtships in Thailand, they were unable to to seek information about their husbands' backgrounds. Therefore, the fears they shared were very understandable.

Strategies For Resolving Fears

Those women who were fearful about being tricked into prostitution, or just about whether or not they were making the right decision, employed several strategies to resolve, or at least cope with, their fears. Suda's strategy was to adopt a fatalistic attitude. Though she carried her fear of being tricked with her into her marriage, her strategy enabled her to bear her fear until it was resolved. She decided to take the risk of coming to Canada and marrying her husband. Her action was predicated on the fact that she felt that there was no chance of her finding a good man

other than her husband, and that she hoped for a better life in Canada. She made up her mind by rationalizing that whatever will be, will be. She said to herself, *"Pai Tai Ao Dab Na,"* which, in Thai, means accepting the risk. Her fear of being tricked was not resolved before she entered the marriage, but after a few months in Canada, her fear subsided.

Like Suda, Dara also adopted a fatalistic attitude, but employed two other strategies that helped her to deal with her fears. These were 1) looking for signs of her future husbands's willingness to support her, and 2) seeking psychological support from astrologers. The following excerpt from her transcript illustrates all three strategies:

> He sent me money and wrote me letters for half a year. That showed me that he was willing to take care of me and would not want to sell me...
> I decided to come to Canada, and thought that whatever would happen, would happen, and that if it was not good or successful, I would die in Canada. I thought that I would not go back and face people in Thailand if I didn't succeed. I hoped that I could build a business in Canada. . . .If I didn't succeed there, I wouldn't go back. I had a goal to be successful. If I have money, people won't say anything bad. I don't want anyone to criticize me or my family...
> I went to wat [temple] every day. I asked the monk to check my astrology, and went to many astrologers that were advertised in a magazine called *"Ku-sang Ku-som."* They weren't very good except for one monk who read my palms. He told me that if I changed my residence and went abroad, my life would be better.

Dara's method of eliminating her fears about her future husband followed an orderly pattern. Her first strategy was

to obtain financial support from her future husband. Dara rationalized that the money and letters the man sent her for six months was indicative of his love, sincerity, and willingness to take good care of her. The second strategy that Dara employed was to adopt a fatalistic attitude and to risk coming to Canada to learn more about her husband. But before taking this action, Dara employed the third strategy which was to seek psychological support from many astrologers and fortune tellers in Thailand.

Though she was never concerned about being tricked into prostitution, for Worawan, receiving financial support from her future husband helped to alleviate any anxieties she had about marrying him. Worawan corresponded with her husband for three years. It was when she finished her training as a hair dresser, which he financially supported, that she decided to emigrate to Canada to marry him. By that time, she did not have a fearful attitude because she was certain that her husband was the right person for her.

Evidently, the strategy of getting financial support from their potential husbands worked well in resolving the women's fear if the support continued over a period of time. Besides the fact that some of the women were poor and in need of money, receiving financial support from their future husbands gave them a sense of security that the men would be willing to take care of them and not trick them into prostitution. The longer the period of financial support,

the less fearful the women were when they had to make the decision to marry their husbands.

Family and Social Considerations

Parental approval for marrying a *farang* was more likely to have been sought by those participants who were younger. Somjai was one of those. She described her father's reaction to her decision to marry her husband as follows:

> At first, he didn't want me to have a *farang*. He didn't like that. He had no idea what kind of a *farang* my husband was. My father questioned whether or not he was a low class *farang*, what kind of job he had. Another thing was my Thai boyfriend was very rich. My father wanted me to associate with rich people like us (laugh). I told my father that my husband had a good job, a good position, and how much his salary was. My father said, "okay." My father told me that he wouldn't allow me to marry the poor. He didn't want me to have difficulty.

Nareerat was also concerned about her family's reaction:

> My husband appeared to be very mature and responsible. . . .My family had the opinion that he was a good person. So, I agreed to marry him.

While only two of the nine women clearly expressed a desire for parental approval prior to marriage, the majority of women indicated, either directly or indirectly, a desire to appease their parents and to gain the social stamp of approval from their communities. Marriage ceremonies were important for the majority of the women because of status considerations, and because they reassured the parents that

their daughters had married suitable men. A marriage ceremony gave each woman and her family the social prestige of making the community aware that the man loved her enough to follow through with Thai customs. Rituals, such as a brideprice, also remained important for reasons of economic exchange as well as social prestige. Many women perceived their marriage ceremonies and the arranging of bride prices as their ways of showing gratitude to their parents for raising them.

> I came to Canada with my husband, and married him here. Then, we had a wedding ceremony in Thailand four months later. . . .We went back to Thailand so that my husband and my family could meet each other. We had a wedding ceremony in my home town. . . .For people in rural area, if you are not properly wed, it is still an uncertain thing. (Jintana)

> Before we got married [4 months prior to the interview], I told him that I wanted to go back to Thailand next year to have a wedding ceremony for my mother's sake. I didn't want a big ceremony but wanted my relatives to acknowledge our marriage. . . .Here, we didn't have monks for the religious ceremony. When we go to Thailand, we might have a proper religious ceremony in the morning, and a reception in the evening. . . .We agreed that he will give $5000 as a bride price to my mother. (Dara)

> I demanded of my husband that we have a church wedding. My husband wanted only a registered process. I didn't agree with him because I didn't want Canadian men to look down on Thai women. I didn't agree to just get a marriage license. I asked him what I would tell my children and grandchildren. Marrying a foreigner, what is the custom? How could I explain to them? . . .If there were no wedding ceremony, I wouldn't marry him. (Worawan)

> When I got married, my husband gave my mother the bride price of $5000. My mother and my step-father got the

bride price because they raised me. (Witty)

The evidence outlined here shows that each of the participants in this study had important issues to deal with before entering into marriage with Canadian men. After marriage, there were different matters to contend with, matters which began to take precedence in the women's lives. These will be described in the sext section.

Stage II: Adjusting to Marriage

Major Theme: Carrying on the Marriage

An attempt to "carry on the marriage" emerged from the data as the ultimate goal for all of the women after they were married. Each of them was faced with tremendous pressures soon after arrival in Canada. Not only did they face the stress of adapting to a totally different environment, but there were also issues of greater significance to deal with within each marriage. Despite the difficulties, every participant was committed to her marriage and was making efforts to maintain it.

> Marriage is like the yoke of an oxen. . . .I can't go back to Thailand alone. We have to go together, otherwise we have to divorce. I have no thought of considering a divorce. (Malee)

> I came here [Canada] with a strong determination to make my marriage a success. (Witty)

> I was still old fashioned [before her divorce] and did not want to go for a divorce. Although I was not happy with my marriage, I never thought of initiating the divorce. (Tassana)

All of the women, both those who came to Canada to marry their husbands and those who came to Canada after marrying their husbands in Thailand, were faced with a new world. For these women, marriage included demands made on them to make adjustments to this new environment. Though only one participant sought counselling to help her settle in after arriving in Canada--she went to Catholic Social Services--they all had to make efforts to adapt. Physical adjustments were required to a great extent. Difficulties in adjusting to cold weather, a lack of familiar food, and language barriers were discouragements with which some of the participants were confronted. The following is Dara's description of her physical symptoms when she first arrived in Canada:

> At the beginning, I couldn't sleep at night. I slept in the daytime for the whole day. I couldn't get to sleep until close to morning. . . .I had to use an electric blanket and turned it on to the highest level. . . .When I went outside, it was like I climbed a high mountain. I felt dizzy all the time and had no energy. After going out, my eyes were blurry. I got many symptoms. I had a lot of problems with my hair and my skin. . . .My skin was itchy. It got tight and itchy. Nothing seemed to help. I scratched my whole body and it was red all over. I got a rash. My face was swollen and itchy. My lips were dry and cracked.

For Worawan, a lack of familiar food was one of the problems to overcome:

> I was about to die because I didn't have rice and Thai dishes. For the first week I only ate apples, which gave me an upset stomach. I could eat apples because we have them in Thailand. After the first week, my husband's friend told us about a Thai restaurant. We went there. It was my first Thai meal after arriving in

> Canada a week earlier. Then we wanted to do grocery shopping in Chinatown but couldn't find it. My husband had no idea where Chinatown was. He didn't know the place at all. After four or five months, we learned where Chinatown was and started to shop there. (Worawan)

Jintana shared the same experience as Worawan, but was lucky enough to settle her problem faster:

> When I first came here, I ate *farang* food only to prevent my stomach from hurting. I couldn't eat it. I didn't like it. When it is salty, it is very salty. It doesn't have the nice taste as our food. . . .after the first week, everything was settled. I knew a Khmer friend who ate food similar to Thais so everything was okay. Food was no longer a problem. (Jintana)

Both the lack of familiar food and the language barrier had a tremendous impact on Suda:

> I became pregnant and craved Thai food. I craved Thai fruit, especially mangoes. I missed Thailand. I asked my husband to send me back to Thailand. When I returned to Thailand, I had no thought of coming back to Canada again because of the difficulty with the language and food. I dreamed about Thai food--sour and sweet things to eat--every night. It was very difficult to get Thai food or the ingredients at that time. I thought that I wouldn't return to Canada if he did not come to Thailand to get me. I thought food was more of a problem than language. . . .Language played an important part too because I got headaches when I couldn't communicate, and couldn't understand English.

These physical adjustments were just the beginning of the adaptation required of these Thai women. They also had to adjust to a marriage that required greater compromises than the average marriage between people from similar backgrounds. For at least half the women there were some elements of the marriage, such as finances and marital

roles, that turned out to be different than what they expected.

Financial Expectations

Many participants soon learned that their husbands, who appeared to be richer than Thai men in Thailand, could not provide them with as much as they had expected. For example, a trip to Thailand would add to the financial strain of the marriage. Of the nine participants, only one was able to visit Thailand on a yearly basis without being financially concerned. In some cases, the women had to seek employment outside the home. Jintana was one of the women who was surprised at the reality of her financial situation after marriage:

> When I was with my husband [in Thailand], he asked me whether I wanted this or that. I thought, "he is a *farang* who has more money than a Thai." . . .Before I married him, I thought that *farangs* have lots of money. Money was something that we didn't need to care about.

The description of her financial situation at the time of the interview reveals the inaccuracy of Jintana's previous perception:

> My husband put money into the business in the winter time. We are not sure yet that we will have enough money to put into it for this winter. It still worries us.

Jintana's prior view of the *farang*'s wealth is not uncommon among the women in the study. Nareerat, for example, also had unrealistic financial expections. In her

own words, "I expected to be rich, but I am not rich yet." This, she said, was her only unfulfilled wish with respect to her marriage.

Role Expectations

Traditional female roles were expected by all participants in this study although some women had prepared or expected to work. Every woman viewed her role in the marriage as being, primarily, the care giver whose responsibilities included household chores and child rearing, while the husband was expected to be the primary provider and the leader of the family. However, the reality of the finanical circumstances in which most of the women found themselves after marriage led to two of them having to find paying jobs and one having to help with the family business. All three regarded this expansion of their roles within the marriage as a compromise vital for the survival of the relationship:

> It's too bad that I married my husband when the economy was down. After we got married, my husband didn't have a regular job. Sometimes he was employed and other times he was unemployed. . . .This is a wealthy society. You have to have money. Everything has to be paid. It's difficult when we don't have money. My husband's job is not stable so I have to keep my jobs. (Malee)

> He said he would give me some saving money if he worked. I think my role is that of a wife. My job is to nurture a family. His job, as a husband, is to pay for household expenses. I work hard as much as I can to earn my own spending money. He can not give me spending money because he doesn't have a job and he doesn't have

> lots of money. We can't buy a new car or new furniture because he doesn't have money. If I want to buy anything, I have to buy it myself. I bought this computer with my money. (Witty)

Some of the difficulties faced by the women in the study seem to have resulted directly from the nature of the roles they adopted. Three of the six women who took on traditional roles appeared to have problems with loneliness. Those who had children faced the additional stress of parenting, which increased the pressures associated with managing the household. For the three participants who expanded their roles due to financial necessity, loneliness did not appear to be an important concern. Rather, the stress these women faced came from having to divide their time between household duties and the responsibilities of working outside the home.

Stress of Traditional Role

For those who spent time alone at home every day while their husbands were at work (and the children, if any, were at school), physical and social isolation led to a feeling of loneliness and boredom. Somjai, for instance, found herself in this situation:

> I do my duty as a housewife...take care of my children and my husband. . . .Sometimes, when I was home alone, I felt bored. There was nothing to do. Sometimes, I felt homesick. . . .I can't just stay home for the whole day, every day. I can't just do nothing. I have to find something to do...to relax.

The situation was worse for those whose husbands were away for work most of the time. Worawan, whose husband often worked outside the province, explained the issues that she had to deal with:

> He doesn't have much time for me because of his work. He comes home only for a night every two weeks. It's his work. He said he has to work for a living. I understand that. If he didn't have a job, our lives would be different. We would have to suffer. . . .But if I were not patient, I don't think that I could live with him. You see my lifestyle--I am left alone. I have to do everything by myself except if I have problems with language; then I phone him. For instance, I had to ask him to talk to the doctor for me because I couldn't understand medical terms. . . .I was left alone and I got used to it. When I felt lonely, I would go to West Edmonton Mall.

Suda, who had two young children, talked about her loneliness in this way:

> My husband works outside the province and Canada most of the time. He doesn't have much time to be home. He is home one week, and then has to take off to work for two or three months. For the five years that we have been married, one month was the longest time that he was home. . . .When he leaves, I feel lonely. I have a problem getting to sleep every night. I am always worried about what I would do with my two kids if the house caught on fire. How could I get them out? What if some thieves broke into the house?

Being a primary care giver for young children and responsible for all of the household chores overwhelmed some of the women. This was pointed out by Suda in particular:

> At the beginning of our marriage, I thought that it was my duty as a wife to serve him. When he was home, I always served him. I even held my child with one hand and cooked for him with the other hand while he was watching T.V. As time went by, I started to feel that it's not fair. . . .Sometimes, I feel that it's not fair that I have to take care of my children and do all

> the housework. Actually, I really don't mind taking care of my children and doing all the housework. The thing that upsets me most is that I have to clean up after my husband. Why can't he just help me by taking on some responsibility. I don't mind doing the dishes for him if he puts them in the sink. I am tired of having to collect his coffee cups and glasses from all over the place before I can clean up. I don't mind doing the laundry if he puts his dirty clothes in the basket. I am tired of having to pick up his clothes from the floor wherever he gets changed. (Suda)

Stress of Expanded Role

Financial strain led three women to expand their roles as wives and primary care givers by entering the work force or participating in the family business. Pressures from monetary concerns, and feeling overwhelmed by work inside and outside of the home, created hardships for these women. Work pressures identified by the participants included job instability, the need for advanced training that might lead to a professional career, and the demand for language proficiency.

> I am not sure about how long my school job will last. I feel that it is very important for me to find a firm ground if I want to continue working at the school. I have to find a space for myself. That's why I think about going to New York for training. . . .I am trying to gain recognition. I want the school to recognize that I am somebody. I am worth something to this small community. Even my waitress job, it is not stable either. (Malee)

> I was very tired because of the language problems. Customers complained about my English. Also, there was some jealousy among my co-workers because my friend helped me get the job. I had to remind myself that I was capable of doing the work. I had to tell myself to work hard for my wages. I was laid off in September, 1992 because the business slowed down in the winter.

> . . .Then, my husband's friend asked me to work for her. . . .We ran a cowboy shirt shop. I worked very hard but didn't get full pay. My husband's friend, the owner, was occupied with her romance rather than with the business. I was the only one who did the work for which I didn't get paid for two months. I only received $400. She still owes me $1300. It made me angry with her and my husband. Was it crazy? I had to take the bus to work, sew clothes, and not be paid. (Witty)

Malee and Witty also shared how they felt overwhelmed working outside of the home while keeping up with their household duties. However, Malee expected to continue doing her duty as a housewife as much as she was able.

> When I have lots of work, stress has an effect. If I work too hard, I easily get upset because I am tired. . . .I do the housework except the days that I am very busy and need his help. I ask him occasionally for help. . . .I am still used to Thai culture. The woman does the housework, like doing the dishes. . . .Another thing is that I want him to finish his report so that he can make big money. I don't feel that doing the dishes is a big deal. (Malee)

In contrast, Witty resented the work pressures and the workload that her husband demanded of her at home:

> I often questioned myself when I was sewing clothes--"well, is this because I have a husband and that is what makes me sit and sew very hard, and not for my pleasure any more?"
> . . .I have only two hands, not ten. . . .He wanted me to make a new shirt for him, and he also wanted me to cook and to clean the house. What did **he** have to do? (Witty)

Common Tasks to Overcome

For both those with traditional roles and those with expanded roles, the essential tasks required to carry on the marriage included 1) dealing with the language barrier, 2)

establishing relationships with in-laws, 3) finding a balance in their relationships with other Thais, and 4) resolving conflicts due to spousal differences.

1. Dealing with the Language Barrier

The majority of the women in the study began their marriages with very limited abilities to communicate with their spouses. As Suda's comment illustrates, this lack of communicative ability was not something she was initially concerned about:

> When I first met my husband, my friend was our mediator. I couldn't speak English at all. I only knew two or three words like "love" and "marry." I still remember a funny situation when I said to him, "*Manee...Manee*," because I wanted him to come closer to me. He wasn't aware that I talked to him in Thai. He gave me some money as he understood that I asked him for money. . . .I wasn't concerned about language but prepared myself for other things.

Jintana's description of her methods of communication during courtship imply a similar lack of concern about future problems due to language:

> When two people like each other, they don't need to say anything. Just seeing each other's faces is understandable. For example, for meals, we knew the time so we had breakfast or went out for lunch. We didn't talk much but understood things. (Jintana)

In fact, very few participants initially considered language to be extremely important. During the courtship period, the women underestimated the potential difficulties posed by the language barrier. There were obvious reasons

for this. First, the women were more in control because they were still in their own environment, and in a comfortable niche. Second, it was their spouses who were alienated from the majority in terms of language. Third, there was help from people who could intervene as mediators or translators.

After arriving in Canada, the majority of the women immediately experienced the loss of their language competence. Those who did not prepare themselves by learning English experienced a greater loss of communication. Those who had learned English, but did not fully master it, experienced frustration due to their limited knowledge and skill in English, a different accent, and a different rate of speaking.

Examples of how some participants prepared for the language barrier before coming to Canada were found in the words of Dara and Worawan:

> While I was waiting [for a Canadian visa], I had nothing to do so I took English lessons for a month--two hours for each lesson. . . .I asked the teacher to emphasize speaking because I had to speak more than write. We didn't focus on grammar at all. I went to class every morning. (Dara)

> Before marrying him, I took individual lessons for about three years--two years and eight months--every day for two hours. It was from Monday to Saturday. I took my English lesson after my hair class. After I studied English for 6 months, I wrote letters to my husband by myself. I could write very simple letters to him. My husband understood them. . . .When I came here, I was able to speak English but not over 60 or 70% (Worawan)

After arriving in Canada, both Dara and Worawan had

experiences which indicated to them that their knowledge of English was limited despite their preparation. Their English was in some ways different than the English that was used by Canadians:

> I needed to go to the washroom badly. I looked for the word "toilet" but couldn't find it. I didn't know that here they use the word "restroom" or "washroom." I had to go back to the hotel because of that. It upset me. (Worawan)

> In Thailand, we called the walkman "sound about" so I said "sound about" because it is an English word to me. My husband couldn't understand me because they call it "walkman" here. I had to make a gesture and use the Thai-English dictionary to show him. (Dara)

Witty felt quite competent in communicating with her husband in English while they were in Thailand because she had obtained her Bachelor's degree in English there. In Canada, she was confronted with a different type of language barrier because of a different accent and a rapid rate of speech.

> I thought that because I got my bachelors degree I could pass my husband's test. He asked me difficult questions on subjects like philosophy. If I wasn't able to answer his questions, we would have never fallen in love. . . .But English was still a problem when I came here. I couldn't understand what I heard. People couldn't understand what I said. . . .I couldn't listen well. The people talked very fast. Whenever I spoke, they had to beg my pardon most of the time. I didn't know what to say although I had a good vocabulary. (Witty)

Tassana, like Witty, also obtained her Bachelor's degree in Thailand; and she, too, had difficulty with English after arriving in Canada:

> My English was not good at the time. I still couldn't understand English well. I was okay in reading the written material but poor in listening skills. (Tassana)

Even Somjai, one of the two participants who experienced very little difficulty with English, admitted that she still had some difficulties with English slang:

> In Thailand, we didn't have much of a chance to speak English if we didn't work with *farangs*. I worked for a *farang* company. So, I didn't have to adjust when I came abroad. . . .I asked *farangs* how my English was. They told me it was very good. I wouldn't have problems if I went for an interview. . . .We could joke if there was not too much slang. Sometimes, I don't get the slang.

Their inability to communicate in English brought frustration to most participants. The most serious consequences of the language barrier for these participants was its effect upon their communication with their spouses, their relationships with native English speakers, and their own attitudes towards assimilation. Suda described her frustration with communicating with her husband as follow:

> It annoys me that he doesn't understand me, and that we don't understand each other. We don't communicate well at all. I get upset whenever I talk to him or explain things to him and he doesn't understand. What I say to him is not even half of my thoughts and feelings.

Witty admitted that the reason she did not have prolonged open arguments with her husband was that they did not have a common understanding of English. She explained herself as follows:

> I have not mastered English enough to fight with him in English. He can speak some Thai but has not mastered it either. . . .We can't express our emotions quickly

enough to maintain a heated discussion. (Witty)

Worawan talked about the frustrating experience of not being able to respond to others in English, and her sense of being treated unequally because of the language barrier:

> When people talk to me, I don't know how to answer. I don't know how to translate Thai into English. I know what they are saying but I can't reply. . . .I feel that there is caste difference between Westerners and us. I still feel that Westerners think that we are not equal to them. There is a caste system. I think that it is human nature. The first thing I will do is to keep studying. I will improve my English so that I can respond to them. They don't feel that we are equal to them because of the language.

Jintana indicated that the language barrier contributed to a feeling of boredom when she visited her husband's friends. When she was with Thais, the experience was more enjoyable for her:

> It [having a conversation in English] is an unusual feeling. It is not as genuine as when I talk to Thais. Actually, I should be able to use the topics I use when I talk to Thais, only I need to say it in English. But it is not only that. I feel that something pressures me or pulls me back. . . .With the Thais, the conversation never ends. I can talk for the whole day and the whole night.

The drawbacks associated with the language barrier seemed to be lessened for those women who had a great deal of support from their husbands, friends, and in-laws. This point is clearly illustrated by the comments made by Nareerate, Dara, and Suda:

> When I first arrived, I couldn't speak English at all. I could only say "hello." I couldn't understand when someone welcomed me. I gradually learned English word

> by word from my in-laws and my husband's friends. I also went to school. Right now, I can speak and understand English a little bit...not much.
> . . .I took a course at the YWCA after I returned from Thailand in March. I studied for two-and-a-half months. I learned to read and write English. My English is getting better. I also practice with a computer program at home. I try to learn how to type and memorize the language. Most often, when I go to parties with my husband, I have to talk to my husband's friends in English. I also learn English from my shopping ventures. When I buy things, I ask the person and learn new words.
> . . .Language is not a problem. When we go to a party, my husband will be beside me all the time. He always listens when people ask me questions. If I don't understand, he will explain it to me. I will respond in English or ask my husband for the words that I don't know. (Nareerat)

Dara, having been in Canada for only four months, also seemed to be comfortable with her adjustment to the new language because of the support she received from others:

> At first, I had problems communicating with my husband. . . .At this point, I don't have as many problems because everyone here teaches me. They correct me when I speak. I am okay now. I know more words. There were lots of problems at the beginning. Right now, there are no problems. If I don't understand, he will use the dictionary. Mostly, we use the dictionary. (Dara)

Unlike Nareerat and Dara, Suda felt unsupported by her husband in her effort to learn the language. Consequently, her comments indicate a higher level of frustration:

> Although I haven't been to school for more than a year, I keep studying at home every day. My husband is not against my studying but he will not teach me English or help me practice it. He always uses the simplest words when he talks to me. . . .I feel that I don't get the support that I need.

It is clear that after their marriages the majority of

the women in the study perceived the language barrier as an obstacle to overcome, and were making efforts to do so. Five of the women mentioned their participation in English As A Second Language (ESL) programs that were offered by various agencies. The language competence they acquired in these classes enhanced their ability to communicate in English as well as their experience meeting people in everyday life. In spite of these efforts, and those informal studies in which the other women engaged, the evidence indicates that many of the women had not completely overcome the language barrier.

2. Establishing Relationships with In-laws

Establishing good relationships with in-laws appeared to be a success for the majority of the participants in this study. Seven out of the nine participants expressed satisfaction with their relationships with their in-laws. The following excerpts from the transcripts illustrate this point:

> His mother is a very good mother-in-law. She would be the first one to send me a gift for my birthday. She bought me things that she knew I liked. When we visit her, she is pleased to make a pie for me. No problem... (Somjai)

> His parents, siblings, and relatives were very nice to me. . . .Although we couldn't communicate, they made me feel warm. It was like I had a family which I never had before. . . .We go to visit his parents and relatives sometimes. (Suda)

> Before we were married, his grandmother mentioned that we had different religions. When I came here, his

> family, including his grandmother, were at the airport to welcome me. . . .We get along very well. . . .His parents, his older brother, and his younger brother--they look at a book and try to talk to me in Thai. If I can't understand, they show me the book. It is a book that has sentences in Thai and in English. Members of his family really try hard to communicate with me in Thai. (Nareerat)

> My husband has very few relatives. He has only his younger sister that he feels close to. I only knew her and his uncle. . . .We hardly visit them. I can get along with them. (Worawan)

> I can have a casual talk with my mother-in-law. I can talk to her like she is one of my Thai relatives... but we don't talk very often. Just once in a while... (Jintana)

Two of the nine participants revealed that they had had conflicts with their in-laws with whom they lived or who lived close to them. Both of these participants felt that the in-laws' involvement was too great. They considered the husband's close family unit a burden. Tassana, who lived with her in-laws after she was married, had this to say:

> When we were married, we lived with his family. I wanted to be independent from his parents. I wanted us to have our own family but he wanted the opposite. In my view, his mother interfered with my life by trying to control me. (Tassana)

Malee lived very close to her husband's family and also reported difficulties with them:

> My problems mostly come from his family. It was a small little thing that annoyed me. Although we are getting along better now, it is still a problem sometimes. (Malee)

For Tassana, the problems with her in-laws seemed to be

due in part to her expectations of Canadian culture, which influenced how she interpreted her in-laws' behaviour. In the following statement, she compares herself with Thai women who do not have such expectations:

> I knew that it was not a *farang* standard that the in-laws interfere with the couple's life. I could not accept the way my mother-in-law treated me. For other Thai women, they might be glad if their in-laws told them what to do. They might think that their in-laws love them or were nice to them. (Tassana)

Malee placed part of the blame for her difficulties with her in-laws on their objections to the marriage and her ability to understand the nuances of English:

> They had the attitude that foreigners who married Canadians did so to stay in Canada. . . .My mother-in-law was also not pleased when I stopped going to her church. . . .I think I suffer from the fact that I understand English too well. If we don't know, we don't worry, right? if someone scolds you and you don't know what the person said, you can smile. Recently, my husband's mother said something that I was unhappy to hear about. It came to my mind that if it were another Thai woman who was married to a *farang*, she may not feel unhappy because she doesn't understand. (Malee)

The success that the other seven women had in establishing good relationship with their in-laws appeared to be due to the following two reasons: 1) The in-laws did not share the same household with the couples and, in most cases, lived a considerable distance from them; 2) the in-laws were supportive of the couples but were respectful of their need for privacy.

3. Finding Balance in Relationships with Other Thais

The women found that interaction with other Thais helped to prevent them from losing their identity and enabled them to achieve a sense of belonging. This interaction gave them the opportunity to use the Thai language, to seek support from people of their own culture, and to help alleviate the feelings of loneliness and homesickness. To illustrate, eight participants were in favor of having the opportunity to associate with other Thais because those relationships served as the women's support system. They talked about their relationships with other Thais in this way:

> It makes me feel warm because when I need help, the help comes from my Thai friends. When I have an urgent need for someone to take care of my children, I can call my friends right away. Mostly, it is about my children. (Jintana)

> It makes me feel like I am not alone. I have friends. We are not relatives, but come from the same place--Thailand. I feel warm. Mostly, we talk on the phone, and have parties. Some Thais will help others with language problems. (Worawan)

> Actually, it warmed my heart that we can talk in Thai, and meet other Thais. I like that. (Somjai)

> We arrange a party nearly every weekend. We take turns hosting these parties. We have all kinds of Thai food. (Nareerat)

Despite the obvious advantages of associating with other Thais, all of the women in the study felt that it is important to establish a balance in their relationships with

Thais. Many participants found that conflicts arose from gossiping, competition and rivalry among them. They described their discomfort in this way:

> It's warm but annoying. There is competition among Thais. I observed that Thai women help each other during difficult times but compete with each other in better times. (Somjai)

> I don't have a TV. They [other Thai women] said that I am very poor. They didn't know that I had books. They didn't know that I don't like TV, because I think that TV will steal my time. Watching TV also causes me to have a headache. I don't mean that people who watch TV are not good. It's a matter of preference, right? (Malee)

> I have to work as a waitress. I don't look down on this job but I have to work with other Thai women who are less educated than I. I work because it is a job. They look at me and think that I have to work as a waitress although I have many degrees. It's good for their egos. (Malee)

> One woman who was a bar girl [in Thailand] discussed among her group that she didn't believe that I never sold my body before. I didn't talk back to her because I knew that she wouldn't believe me anyway. When I was with her, I tried to be down to earth. I never met her in Thailand but if I did, I would be the one in charge of social projects for those like her. I would never go shopping with her [in Thailand]. I don't look down on her but it would really be that way. Here, I can't choose not to associate with them. I also feel respect for these women. I respect them because they had to work in bars in order to take care of their parents. I didn't have to do that. Since they used to have tough lives, it is good for them that they are happy now. (Witty)

The social gap created by the different educational levels and social backgrounds of participants also had its impact on their relationships with other Thais:

> I used to feel hurt when I approached someone and the person didn't care about me. I felt embarrassed that I was rejected, and that I was turned down. Right now, I don't care if I meet that kind of person. I am ready to tell them that they are not any better than I am. . . . Right now, with the snob Thais, I don't care if they don't want to associate with me. It is okay with me now. In the past, I cried and felt sorry that they turned me down. It took me quite a while before I could get over these feelings. (Jintana)

> There are many types of Thai women who married "*farangs*". . . .women from different backgrounds. I like to pick with whom I want to associate because I like to associate with people at my level so that we can talk and communicate. I don't want to put anyone down because they have little education. I had problems communicating with some of them. To be frank, they are not intellectual. I can't laugh when they joke about things. I can guess what the person's background is by just talking to her on the phone. I don't have to see her. When I see her, I look at her style of dress and the way she talks, and I know where she come from. . . .Some women are very sensitive. If you say something that aggravates their weak points--a bar girl or that kind of a woman--she will be harsh. It's like they protect themselves. They are afraid that we will pinpoint them, or be judgmental toward them. They are quite rough. (Somjai)

> Thai women who are married to Canadian men come from different social backgrounds. I don't mean who is better than whom. They may feel bored with me too because I only talk about books. I can't talk about the things that they are interested in, like fashion, money, jewellery or clothes. Those topics are not in my scope. I like to talk about the books that I read. (Malee)

Though each of the participating women identified advantages and disadvantages of having interpersonal relationships with other Thais, they came to different conclusions with respect to pursuing these relationships. Jintana and Somjai, for instance, chose to maintain their

relationships with other Thais. They made these comments:

> Living here, there are very few friends. If I have conflict with one person, I still need to associate with that person. We may not talk to each other today because we are angry with each other, but some day in the future we still have to meet each other. (Jintana)

> I have to meet them for social events anyway. So, it's better to know each other. Otherwise, they would say that I don't want to associate with Thais. (Somjai)

Dara, however, felt that it was not advantageous for her to have relationships with other Thais.

> I came here because I wanted to learn new things and have new experiences. . . .I think I need new experiences to enhance my quality of life and make me able to teach others. I should not occupy myself with a group of Thais. I will not learn anything new. (Dara)

Finding a balance in their relationships with other Thais was one of the issues that some of the participants had already resolved. However, the very nature of this issue required the women to make ongoing efforts. Avoiding fights or arguments when upset, avoiding gossiping and deciding upon criteria for what, when, and with whom to associate were some of the strategies used by the women.

> There is some small talk like gossiping, but we never have any fights or arguments. It's human nature, I think. In general, we are quite cooperative. Everyone joins in the activities. I never have any problem with anyone. (Worawan)

> Among friends, we keep quiet when we are upset until we calm down, then we talk to each other again. (Jintana)

> I can get along with everybody. I don't talk about other people's business. For example, if someone starts

> gossiping, I would avoid sitting in that group. I try to leave the group when it's getting crowded. ...I have to be careful because sometimes you say something that people may understand in a different way. (Nareerat)
>
> Sometimes, I feel bored. Sometimes, I miss them. When I feel bored, I don't care if they invite me. When I miss them, I go if they invite me. . . .I can be alone. I don't feel restless. If I miss them, I pick up the phone and call them. (Witty)
>
> If it is a productive activity, like an Association event, I will join them. I am not totally cut off from all partying. If I refuse to go every time, they will think that I am snobbish. (Malee)
>
> I had an experience in associating with one bar girl who was the wife of my husband's friend. She was quite a good person. She talked politely. I can associate with her. It's not that I won't associate with bar girls, but they must have good manners and be able to communicate. If they are mean, I can not accept them. (Somjai)

4. Resolving Marital Conflict due to Spousal Differences

As do most married women, each participant had to find effective ways of resolving conflicts with her spouse. Generally, these conflicts came about because of individual differences, cultural differences, and the overlap between the two. Personal habits, food preferences, child-rearing styles, communication, sex, and religion were some of the particular issues the women identified. Cultural differences, as one might expect, led to many disagreements in the marriages. However, the most critical conflicts, according to the women, were due to individual differences. Only two women thought that cultural differences caused the most serious problems, while seven identified personal

differences as the main source of conflict in their marriages. The variety of these personal differences are evident in the comments that follow:

> He turns on the light and never thinks to turn it off. He drives me crazy. . . .We have different opinions. I like things to be clean and in order. (Suda)

> We had to go to a cocktail party at 6 p.m. I asked my husband at 5 p.m. whether my dress was nice. He got upset that I was not ready to go to the party yet. I was mad because I asked him for his opinion about my dress, not for him to rush me. . . .For him, going to a party is like going to a ten thousand dollar business meeting. Every party, my husband has to be the first one there. . . .For women, we want to look beautiful, right? I wanted him to help me select my dress or tell me whether or not my make up was okay. I often felt mad and wanted to not dress up for these parties. (Jintana)

> I don't like alcohol or cigarettes but he has been drinking and smoking for more than 20 years. (Dara)

> He drank and got sick for 2 days and laid down on the sofa. I asked him on the third day to return things to a friend and he couldn't do it. But when his friend called, he was ready to go out. Should I be angry? I got angry. . . .When he drinks, he complains about not being able to smoke pot as some Canadian husbands of Thai wives do. (Witty)

> My husband doesn't plan things ahead. It frustrates me when there is no plan. We are different in that respect. For example, I would prepare my dress the night before. I am the oldest daughter in my family. I had to take care of everything in the house. If I didn't get things organized before going to bed, I would not get to sleep. My husband is the youngest boy in his family, the same as my youngest brother. His life is very fortunate. He never had to plan. There was always someone doing things for him. (Malee)

> I liked to talk and discuss things but he didn't. He expected me to be quiet. He couldn't accept me talking back to him. He said he was disappointed. (Tassana)

Most of the conflicts derived from cultural differences revolved around food preferences but included a variety of other concerns. These difficulties appeared to be less problematic and less frequent than individual differences. A few examples follow:

> My husband and I share the same problem. He has to have a little bit of Western food at a Thai meal, and I have to have a little bit of Thai food at a Western meal (Suda)

> He doesn't eat spicy food. I like very hot and spicy food. (Somjai)

> He thought that our food was no good and that the spice made people sick. He was disgusted by the smell of the food. When he smelled our food, he thought that it was rotten. He thought that his food was nutritious and better than ours, but I didn't think so. I couldn't eat his food. . ..My stomach was upset. I didn't eat *farang* food because it upset my stomach. I found other food that I could eat. (Tassana)

> Sometimes, I saw my husband as selfish like all Westerners. It is true, right? I think that his culture is different from ours. Westerners think about themselves first. They are not as altruistic as Thais. . . .Westerners are trained to help themselves first, and not be concerned much about others. (Worawan)

> He is Baptist. I think that sometimes he is too narrow. . . .He believes that there is only one God. He is not open to hear about other religions. (Malee)

Some of the issues the women raised involved a combination of individual and cultural differences. A few of these are outlined in the comments below:

> I feed my children and help them dress. My husband likes the children to be independent. We have disagreements over that. (Suda)

> I don't like clothes that expose too much of me. He said that it was nice. I told him that it would not be proper for a Thai to wear it. He said it was popular here. (Nareerat)

> There are times that I feel angry. He likes to pat my head or my legs while I watch TV. He says it is because he loves me. He also touches or plays with the children that way too. I like to watch TV quietly. When he walks by, he pats my head which annoys me. (Somjai)

> My idea of sex is like in a romantic novel...gentle kisses. . . .but I think *farangs* are more experimental with sex. (Witty)

Strategies for Resolving Conflicts

Compromising, enduring-adjusting, and working within oneself were labels I found to fit the strategies that the majority of the women used to resolve conflicts that arose between them and their spouses. The first strategy, "compromising," appeared to be the most effective in achieving a settlement of the differences if both spouses were willing to do so. All participants except one were able to compromise with their spouses where food was an issue because the woman's perceived role as care-giver included cooking. The following two comments are typical of those women who were able to compromise on the food issue:

> I mostly cook very spicy food for myself because I don't like the mild taste of the food I cook for him. It isn't delicious. It's too bland. I have to make it bland for him. (Somjai)

> Mostly, we ask each other before preparing food. I do the cooking, so I make things that I like to eat. If my husband wants to eat something different, I cook that

for him. (Jintana)

The following comments illustrate some of the other issues on which the women attempted to reach a compromise:

> I used to get upset when he got drunk. I kept quiet until he was sober. Then, I told him that I don't mind that he drinks but it should not be too much. (Dara)

> If he comes home and wants to turn on his music loud, he can do that upstairs. He can have his own space. (Somjai)

> We discuss when we have a problem. We tell each other what should be done to resolve the problem. We reason with each other. (Nareerat)

> We agreed that we won't swear when we are angry at each other. If we are upset, we will keep quiet first. (Malee)

> My husband needs justification when asked to help others. I give him reasons and he considers them. For example, he understands my mother's situation so he sends money to help her twice a year in the harvest time. (Worawan)

> My husband and I are flexible. He doesn't mind going to *wat* [temple], and I don't mind going to church. Actually, we don't really practice any religion at all. (Suda)

When reaching a compromise was impossible, either because of the lack of spousal cooperation or due to the nature of the conflict, the women used one or both of the other two strategies. Examples of "enduring-adjusting to the problem" are contained in the following statements:

> Since my husband doesn't like to plan things, I make a list of what I have to do and what to remind him to do

for the day. (Malee)

> My husband thinks that I am trying to control him to do things my own way. I don't think that I want to control him. . . .When we are in conflict and start to have an argument, my husband walks away. We both keep quiet. We never seriously discuss things. When we have problems, I usually initiate the discussion. My husband insists that he won't discuss things that are not good topics to discuss. Nothing is resolved. (Suda)

> When there are conflicts, I keep quiet and talk to him when we are both in a good mood. . . .I don't keep it inside. I talk to him. If he can't change, it's his problem. If I can stand it, it's okay. If I can't stand it, I tell him again one more time. If he doesn't believe me, it's okay. I don't nag him. (Dara)

> If it is a big conflict, which happens sometimes, we both keep quiet and let it go. . . .We don't fight, so then it is okay. (Jintana)

> At first, I cried easily. Living here taught me to speak out when I am angry. Right now, I am a bitch (laugh). If he says one bad word, I reply with more. We quarrel very often but never get very serious. When I get very angry, I withdraw myself by going out to the mall. (Worawan)

Working within themselves to reduce the conflict and the associated stress was the third strategy the women employed, often in combination with the previous strategy:

> I have rehearsed what I want to say to him in my head. I talk to myself, saying things like, "How many times have you done this?...you drive me nuts." After I rehearse it, I feel better. So, I don't have to say it. But I think one day I will actually say it to him. (Jintana)

> I really think that my husband is a good person. I should let go of the things that bother me about him rather than trying to change him. . . .There is no reason for me to divorce him. Besides, if I divorce

> him, my children would suffer from not having both parents. I don't want my children to come from a broken home like I did. Furthermore, I don't think that I could find anyone better than him. I appreciate the goodness in my husband. (Suda)

> I try to look for his good part. I try to ignore his habits that upset me and look for his good part. I think I can forgive others so why not forgive my own husband. . . .I don't think that I will find anyone who can understand my thoughts as my husband does. I don't want to have to start over again. (Malee)

Of the nine women, only one sought marriage counselling when the conflicts appeared to be getting out of hand. Failure to resolve the conflicts within the marriage led this participant and her husband to divorce. The constant stresses and conflicts eventually led the remaining women into a time of reflection.

Stage III: Reflecting on Marriage and Needs

Major Theme: Considering Options

Conflicts and stresses that arose from time to time challenged each woman to reflect on her marriage and her needs within that relationship. At this stage, "considering options" to fulfill one's needs appeared to be a common theme for the women in this study.

For Somjai, Nareerat, Dara, Malee and Worawan, all of whom were satisfied with their married lives, seeking other interests to fulfill their individual needs was of paramount importance. One participant, for example, sought educational counselling in an attempt to satisfy her needs. Jintana,

Witty, Suda and Tassana, who were dissatisfied with the condition of their marriages, explored alternatives such as changing roles or circumstances in the marriages or leaving the marriages. These alternatives were not possible, however, because the women felt trapped by financial dependency, concerns for the well-being of their children, and the fear of not being able to find substitute mates. The women were aware of the consequences that they would suffer, both economic and social, if they divorced. The following quotations illustrate the participants' reflections upon their married lives (r), and their plans to fulfill their needs (p):

> (r) My marriage is successful...smooth...no problems. We have one daughter and one son. My husband has a good position with a good salary. As for my daily life...I can go to play tennis or go horseback riding. He doesn't mind that...it's up to me. I can pursue my studies or work. He doesn't force me to. . . .I feel that I have everything. I don't want more. (Somjai)
>
> (p) I am thinking about taking some short courses or going to work. I am not sure. I have to think about it. My husband doesn't mind that. I asked him if he would help me with the housework if I go to work. He said he would, and for me not to worry. (Somjai)
>
> (r) I would say my marriage is satisfactory. I am satisfied with everything. We do not have too many problems. Mostly, it's easy. We understand each other. We talk and consult one another before taking any action. So, we don't have problems. It's simple and easy. (Nareerat)
>
> (p) I think I will go back to the YWCA one more time for the same ESL program. It will take two-and-a-half months. My goal is to be able to read and write so that I can take a designing course. (Nareerat)

(r) It is a success right now. It's like I've taken the first step. I couldn't move up in Thailand. I was at zero and immobile. Right now, I have moved up one step. I've only been married for two months and I can't say what the future will be, but I will try my best. (Dara)

(p) My goal now is to study. I want to speak good English. I want to be fluent in English and be able to write letters. After I am able to do that, I will study tourism. . . .I want to have a tour business. I will open a tour company in Canada. (Dara)

(r) Frankly, love is blind. I don't feel sorry that I married my husband. There is also a happy part to being married to my husband. I gained an understanding about life. I learned about myself. I learned to be patient. I learned to view life from another aspect. It is not the case that the insider wants to be out and the outsider wants to be in. We are not always together. He often has to work outside the province. That allows me to have an opportunity to be alone and to think. I don't think about being out of the marriage. (Malee)

(p) To be honest, I am still indecisive. It is like a three way route. . . .I am not sure whether I should go back to Thailand, or go for training in New York, or just continue what I am doing now. (Malee)

(r) Sometimes, in some moods, I say being single is also good. It happens once in a while (laugh) that I feel like being single. But being married is good in some ways. . . .my husband is good. He is everything that I expect a man to be. (Jintana)

(p) I will get a job when my children grow. I can't live without working. (Jintana)

(r) I used to have an ideal that I would marry only once and my marriage must last forever. I don't think that way now. I can live alone. If I go back to Thailand now, I can live there because I have trained myself not to use money as I did before. I can wear a skirt and flirt in the bar or dig the ground as a farmer. I am only an ordinary person. (Witty)

(p) It is not the time that I can demand a divorce and go back to Thailand. I am afraid that I might not survive here if I get a divorce, but going back to Thailand would make me lose face and break my heart. (Witty)

(r) I often feel unhappy, and wish I could divorce him. Sometimes I don't want to put up with him any longer. (Suda)

(p) I don't know what I'd do if I divorced him right away. I think I have to bear my situation until I can finish my school so that I can work and be independent. . . .I will try to keep up my studies although it would take me a very long time due to the fact that I have to raise my children. I will try to finish high school. I want to be a secretary or have a job that relates to reading and writing skills. (Suda)

(r) I did not initiate the divorce, because I was worried about how to survive and raise my child if I got divorced. My ex-husband was the one who filed for a divorce. . . .I have been happier since my divorce. I gained full custody of my child. I feel free and am proud of myself. (Tassana)

(p) After my divorce, I upgraded my education by taking two classes. These classes made me qualified for the job I currently hold. (Tassana)

Place of Residence and Citizenship

One important decision faced by all the women in the study and their spouses was where they should establish their permanent residence. A secondary consideration was what citizenship(s) the women should hold. With regard to residency, most of the women chose to accommodate or conform to their husbands' desires. In most cases, this meant

establishing a permanent residence in Canada, although many couples had not yet reached a final decision. For those who had children, Canada was the definite choice, mainly because the women felt that it would be better for their children in terms of the standard of living and educational opportunities.

The following quotations illustrate how the women decided upon their future place of residence:

> I will stay where my husband lives. My husband doesn't want to settle in Thailand. He can go for a visit, but not to live there forever. He used to live in Thailand. He doesn't like the traffic jams and the hot weather. He likes cold weather. I also want to be in Thailand for visits, like seeing my parents or for holidays; but I don't think that I would go back to live there unless we get divorced. That's different. (Somjai)

> My husband doesn't want to live here [Canada] . . .I planned to open a restaurant [in Thailand]. I don't think I want to live here, but it will take at least 5 years for my husband and I to be able to move to Thailand. . . .What if we have a child? We still have to think about that. . . .We want to build a business together, perhaps importing Thai silk. We want to sell Thai products here in summer and Western products there in winter. If the business goes well, we can visit Thailand very often, but we don't have to live there. We want to build a house there within two years. (Nareerat)

> At the very beginning, my husband and I thought about residing in Thailand after retiring. After living in Canada for a period of time, I changed my mind. I'd rather stay in Canada. My husband left it up to me... It's clean here. It is nicer, and has better social services. . . .It provides a better environment for my children. (Suda)

> I think there is no other place that I can feel as comfortable in my heart as I do in Thailand. It's so convenient and easy-going in Thailand. . . .I would

like to live in Thailand. My husband says that he doesn't know yet but he would like to live here. He said that it would be more convenient if we needed medical care. It would be tough if we lived in Thailand and didn't have much money. He wants to live here. He likes his country. I told him that I want to live in Thailand. He told me that we need to have lots of money because I have to see the doctors very often. . . .We have not reached a final decision. (Worawan)

He said he would like to live in Thailand after retiring or when he is very old, but he also mentioned that it depends on whether he can sell his work in Thailand. He has to consider that because he loves to draw. If he can sell his drawings, he will live in Thailand. If he can't, he will have to stay here. . . .I think I definitely will go back to Thailand. I will die in Thailand for sure. . . .I think that I am a Thai so I will die in Thailand. If my husband lives here, I will have to come back and forth to take care of him and the business. (Dara)

It is 90% certain that we will live in Canada. . . .We both think that there will be an increase in the world population. There may be wars in the East. Canada is huge so it should be able to accommodate more people. Although Thailand has good control over the increasing birth rate, the neighbours may come to our country to fight for food. . . .We talked about it and I suggested that we should live in Thailand when we get old. If we live here, the children won't take care of us when we get old. They will just visit you sometimes. If we live in Thailand, we will have children as well as relatives who can give support and provide food and water for us. He said we must see because when we get old, Thailand may be overpopulated. Food may be a problem which may cause wars. He said we have to wait and see. If it is okay, we may live there. (Jintana)

If it is only myself, I won't live here for the rest of my life because I can't utilize much of my knowledge. The problem is that it would be difficult for my husband to live in Thailand. Although he could teach at a University, the salary wouldn't be enough for him to fly back and forth to Canada if he missed his family. (Malee)

I want to be able to live in both countries. (Witty)

> I live here for my daughter's sake. The environment here is better for her. (Tassana)

With regard to citizenship, every participant's ideal was to hold dual citizenship. None of the participants had given up their Thai citizenship because of the legal and social consequences. Many women considered the implications of their marriages ending in divorce or death, such as the complications the relinquishment of citizenship would pose should they wish to reestablish it.

> They should let me hold two citizenships. I think they will let me hold both, but I never checked. Some people told me that we can apply for Canadian citizenship after three years. . . .Like I said, if they allow me to hold both, I will take it; but if they will keep my Thai passport, I won't apply for Canadian citizenship. Even though I would stay here for many years or for the rest of my life, I won't let them keep my passport. I can apply for a visa as a follower of my husband. (Somjai)

> I would like to have dual citizenship. . . .I haven't inquired about the regulations yet. (Nareerat)

> I will apply for Canadian citizenship, but keep my Thai passport. (Suda)

> I am not sure whether I should go for Canadian citizenship. The Thai Embassy warned me to think carefully. . . .What if I divorce my husband or he dies? (Worawan)

> If both Thailand and Canada let me hold two nationalities, it will be great. But if they don't, I won't become a Canadian. I will hold Thai citizenship and claim the right to stay here because I am married to a Canadian. In Thailand, I will use my last name. Here, I use my husband's last name. (Dara)

> I will apply for Canadian Citizenship, but I will not give up my Thai passport. (Jintana)
>
> I still hold my Thai passport. (Malee)
>
> I am going to apply for Canadian citizenship. If I have my business [in Thailand], I might have to bring ESL students from Thailand to Canada. I want information on whether or not Thailand allows us to have dual citizenship. (Witty)
>
> I became a Canadian after I divorced for 5 years. My lawyer suggested that I apply for Canadian citizenship because I have a child. It would help if I were to be out of a job. But I still have a Thai passport. (Tassana)

Summary

The experiences of the nine Thai women in Thai-Canadian marriages were described in this chapter. Every woman believed that she had found a good husband. They all then attempted to carry on their marriages and eventually explored their options. Each woman either took on a traditional role or an expanded role and faced the consequent stresses particular to each role. The primary problem associated with the traditional role appeared to be loneliness, though when children were involved, there was also the increased stress of parenting. Those women who took expanded roles had difficulty trying to balance their responsibilities within and outside of the home.

All the participants in the study faced some common tasks, regardless of the role they adopted in their marriages. These were 1) dealing with the language barrier,

2) establishing relationships with in-laws, 3) finding a balance in their relationships with other Thais, and 4) resolving conflicts due to spousal differences.

With regard to the marital relationship, each participant had to find effective ways of resolving conflicts with her spouse, which were generally due to individual differences between the partners, cultural differences, and the overlap between the two.

After being married for a period of time, each woman began to reflect on her married life. Many women were contented with their marriages but realized that marriage could not provide everything they needed to feel fulfilled. As well, some women were not satisfied with the conditions of their marriages. Some women admitted that they were trapped in the marriage because of their financial dependency on their husbands, the fear that they would not be able to find another husband, and their concern for their children's well-being.

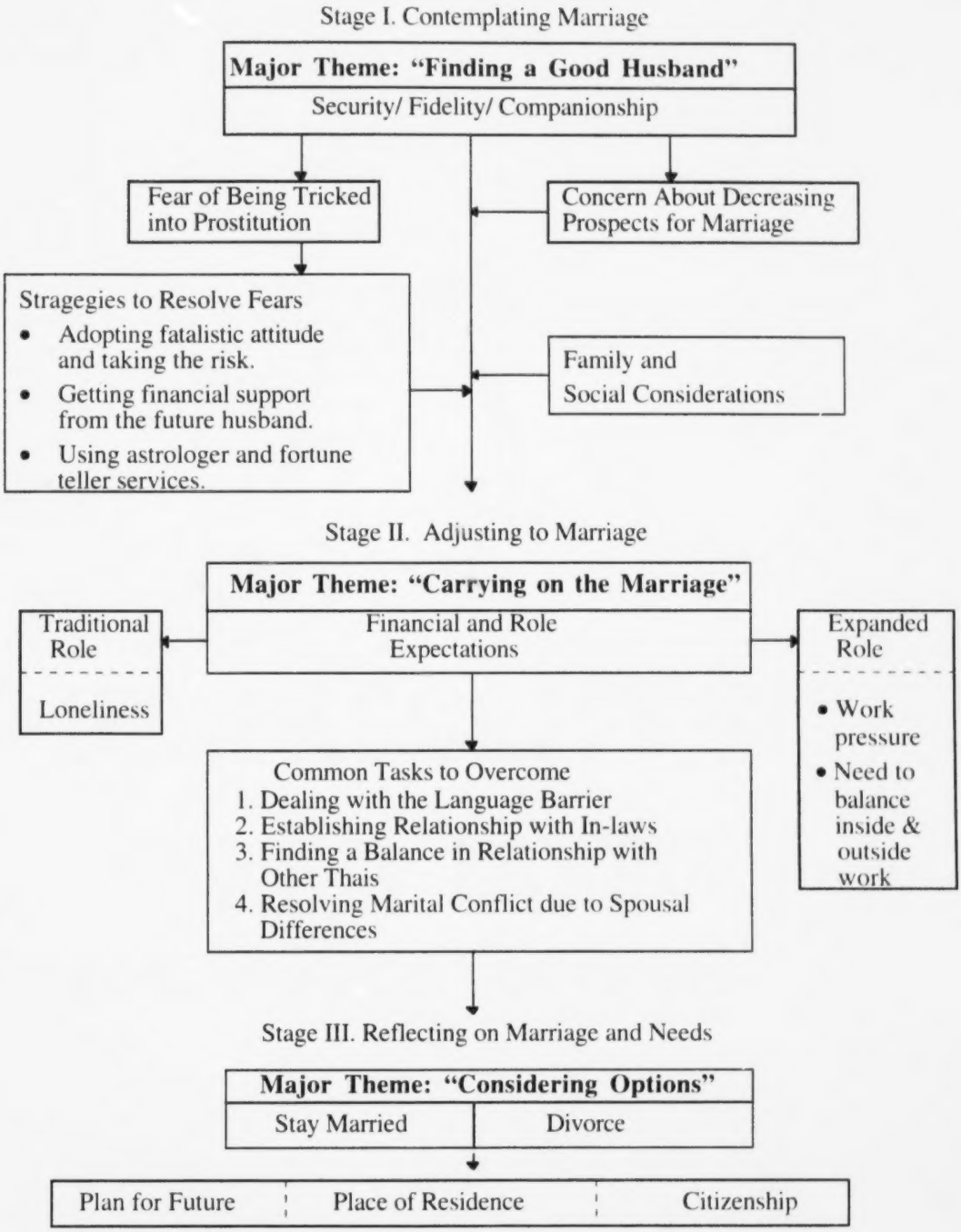
Exploring options to fulfill individual needs seemed to be easier for those who were satisfied with the marriage than for those who were dissatisfied. Many women considered engaging in self development. One participant planned to work outside the home when her children were older.

Of the nine participants, three experienced counselling. One sought guidance through Catholic Social Services when she first arrived in Canada. Another woman

sought marriage counselling and another sought educational counselling.

The diagram in Figure 1 outlines the three stages of these Thai women's experiences in Thai-Canadian marriages, and the corresponding themes that emerged for each stage. Related topics also appear on the diagram. In the final chapter, the research findings are reviewed in light of the relevant literature.

Figure 1:
Diagram of Thai Women's Experiences


Stage I. Contemplating Marriage
Major Theme: "Finding a Good Husband"
Security/ Fidelity/ Companionship
Fear of Being Tricked into Prostitution
Concern About Decreasing Prospects for Marriage
Stragegies to Resolve Fears
• Adopting fatalistic attitude and taking the risk.
• Getting financial support from the future husband.
• Using astrologer and fortune teller services.
Family and Social Considerations
Stage II. Adjusting to Marriage
Major Theme: "Carrying on the Marriage"
Financial and Role Expectations
Traditional Role
Loneliness
Expanded Role
• Work pressure
• Need to balance inside & outside work
Common Tasks to Overcome
1. Dealing with the Language Barrier
2. Establishing Relationship with In-laws
3. Finding a Balance in Relationship with Other Thais
4. Resolving Marital Conflict due to Spousal Differences
Stage III. Reflecting on Marriage and Needs
Major Theme: "Considering Options"
Stay Married
Divorce
Plan for Future
Place of Residence
Citizenship

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The data collected from the nine women who participated in this study covered a wide range of marital experiences. Some of these experiences were very individual, reflecting the unique circumstances of the woman involved; but the experiences that led to the major themes and topics identified in the previous chapter were more or less shared by all the women studied. What do the data suggest about Thai women who marry Canadians, and about cross-national marriages in general? The answers to these questions depend largely upon the theoretical perspective with which one approaches the findings of the study. I have chosen to discuss the findings in relation to the three theories outlined in chapter two.

Developmental Theory

From the point of view of the developmental theorist, the findings of this study could suggest a model of the developmental stages particular to Thai women involved in cross-national marriages with Canadian men. These stages are not a modification of the stages in the family life cycle (Duvall & Miller, 1985), which I described in chapter two. Rather, they are parallel stages focused on the development of the women in the study instead of on the development of their marriages. This study deals with the experiences of

nine women, yet the evidence strongly indicates that these Thai women married to Canadian men generally underwent definite and predictable stages. This finding may very well hold true for women in similar circumstances. The first stage covers the period from the time the woman meets her potential mate until the marriage takes place. During this stage the woman seriously contemplates the pros and cons of marriage. She assesses her potential husband to see whether or not he measures up to her concept of a good husband. At the same time, she weighs the risk of marrying him against her present socioeconomic circumstances and her prospects of finding another mate. If she decides to marry the Canadian man and go with him to his country, she moves to the second stage.

The second stage is one of adjustment, both to the new environment and to the marriage itself. The primary concern of the woman during this period is the maintenance of her marriage, which involves four important tasks: dealing with the language barrier, establishing relationships with in-laws, finding a balance in relationships with other Thais, and resolving conflicts due to spousal differences. There are no definite limits to the period of time a Thai woman spends in stage two, which lasts either until she feels adjusted, or until she feels no further adjustment is possible. There is also no clear demarcation between stages two and three. Rather, the two tend to overlap, beginning

some time after the onset of the second stage.

In stage three the woman begins to reflect on her marriage and her personal needs. She considers the options now open to her. If she is relatively satisfied with her marriage, she may be looking for ways to fulfil her personal needs. If she is not satisfied with her marriage, she will consider the possibility of changing the conditions of her marriage, or leaving the marriage.

For all the participants in this study, stage three was a turning point insofar as their personal needs began to be defined apart from marriage. This finding is especially interesting in light of the developmental theories held by Gilligan (1982) and Miller (1976, 1991) which suggest that women develop identity through relationships, especially the marital and parental relationship. Clearly, the nine women in this study entered their marriages looking for fulfillment in their lives, which is not at all surprising considering the social context in which they developed. In Thailand, marriage is still the only legitimate avenue for women to gain gratification for physical and emotional needs in terms of companionship, romance, and sexuality. Contemporary Thai women, it is true, have gained status in society as individuals. Thai women now have equal opportunity with men in obtaining higher education and establishing professional careers (Gardiner & Gardiner, 1991). In fact, an educated and employed woman is no longer

dependent on a man for income or social status (Limanonda, 1986, 1987). However, her self-esteem is still somewhat derived from establishing a marital relationship with a man, because an unmarried woman is still regarded as incomplete in Thai society.

What does it mean, then, that these women began looking for other kinds of fulfillment outside of the marital and parental relationship? Two answers seem to readily present themselves. Perhaps the women needed marriage to discover their own identities, but once these identities began to develop, they no longer needed to be defined solely in terms of marriage and motherhood. Alternatively, when the women were looking to marriage for identity and fulfillment, and not finding it there, they had to begin looking for it within themselves and other relationships.

Even though the study was cross-sectional and ten years was the longest period of marriage involved, it seems reasonable to suggest that there may be further stages of development for the women studied. However, one can only speculate about what they might be. What is quite clear, though, is that there is room for further study in this area.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

The use of symbolic interaction theory instead of developmental theory as a framework for analyzing the data

collected in this study produces somewhat different interpretations. For example, a developmental theorist might explain the Thai women's concern with finding a good husband as simply their attempt to fulfill a deep psychological need for intimacy and commitment in a relationship (Erikson, 1963; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976, 1991). The symbolic interaction theorist, on the other hand, would explain this theme revealed in the study in terms of the socialization process that Thai women experienced (Turner, 1970). In Thailand, as it is in most other parts of the world, marriage is implicity connected to normality and maturity (Gardiner & Gardiner, 1991). It is a condition to which Thai women are taught to aspire and most of them expect to be married in early adulthood (Chamratrithirong, Morgan, & rindfuss, 1986; Hutaserani & Sussangkarn, 1989; Limanonda, 1986). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the older participants in this study were motivated to marry partly by their concern that advancing age would limit their future prospects for marriage. Moreover, Thai women learn that husbands should be responsible men, good providers and faithful to their wives (Basham, 1985; Limanonda, 1986). Naturally, they would look for these qualities in their mates. Having also learned, rightly or wrongly, that Western men possess these qualities to a greater extent than Thai men, the women in the study were very open to pursuing relationships with Canadians.

Once married, all the women in the study concentrated on carrying on their marriages in spite of the many obstacles that had to be overcome. Every woman was committed to her marriage, no matter what her initial reasons for marrying and whether or not the marriage actually gave her satisfaction. This finding is also understandable, even in cases of dissatisfaction with the marriage, since the women were socialized to expect marriages to last (Gardiner & Gardiner, 1991) and to see marriage failure as largely a failure on the woman's part.

Likewise, it makes sense that all nine women were in keeping with Thai traditions with respect to their marital roles. In other words, the roles they adopted in their marriages were very much of a conservative or traditional type. The data show that all the women, despite differences in their levels of education or socioeconomic backgrounds, held traditional concepts of the roles of husbands and wives. They saw males as family leaders and expected them to provide all of or the majority of the family's financial support. They accepted their own roles as followers of their husbands and care-givers for their families. All nine women, including those who expanded their roles to work outside the home and make a contribution to family income, took household chores to be a primary part of their duty as wives. Those who did adopt expanded roles did so because of financial constraint, not because they felt unhappy with the

traditional division of labor. This finding points to the strong effects of sex role socialization.

In Thailand, the division of the sexes is clear cut. Explicit sex role training is introduced as girls and boys grow older (Gardiner & Gardiner, 1991). Girls are trained to assist their parents by helping out around the house and taking care of younger siblings (Chamratrithirong et al, 1986). They are taught to take pride in the art of homemaking. It is not typical for boys to receive such training because housework is viewed as a woman's job. The exception of boys trained to do the housework only occurs when they do not have female siblings.

Socialization (Turner, 1970) might also explain why the participants in the study experienced a turning point, some time after their arrival in Canada, when they began to define personal needs that were separate from marriage. Perhaps this change had something to do with the fact that they began to learn to attach new meaning to the concept of marriage. This symbolic redefinition may have been due in part to the experience of marriage itself, but probably also had to do with the influence of Canadian culture on the women. In Thailand, they had been trained to think of marriage and motherhood as the only possible definition of themselves, the only way to fulfil their needs, in fact, their only needs. In the more egalitarian Canadian society, women tend to see marriage as one part of personal

fulfillment, but not the only part. It seems reasonable to suggest that the participants in the study, influenced by their new social milieu, learned to see themselves as individuals with needs apart from those fulfilled by the marital relationship.

Social Exchange Theory

Applying social exchange theory (Scanzoni, 1972) to the data gathered from the nine women studied yields yet another interpretation of these findings. In this case the women's preoccupation with finding a good husband during the period leading up to their marriages, would not be explained as the result of a deep psychological need for a relationship with a man in order to complement their identities, or around which to define themselves; nor would the concern be seen only as the result of the women's socialization. Instead, the social exchange theorist would suggest that the women were simply "shopping" for beneficial commodities to enhance the quality of their lives. These commodities could include financial security, fidelity, intimacy, social status, and so on. In exchange, the women would provide their husbands with housekeeping, family caregiving, love, or whatever else they were willing to offer.

This theoretical framework provides an interesting perspective on some of the other findings in the study as well. Take, for example, the reasons the participants gave

for choosing to marry Canadians. They believed Western men would be more responsible, more loyal to their wives, and more family oriented. In short, they thought that a Canadian would be a better husband than a Thai. Evidently, the women were willing to take on traditional marital roles if those roles were "differentiated companionate" (Johnson, Huston, & Levinger, 1992), where husband and wife have integrated lives but separate duties. Marriage to a Thai man would probably mean adopting "parallel roles," where the partners have quite separate lives. Such a marriage would not provide the companionship that the women were seeking, and it might very well include a cost they were unwilling to bear--their husbands' infidelity. Obviously, the women did not perceive marriage to a Thai man as a fair exchange for the resources they had to offer. A cross-national marriage appeared to be the better bargain.

The fears that some participants experienced before marriage makes perfect sense from this perspective. Their concern about diminishing prospects for marriage, for example, is really nothing more than a concern about decreased purchasing power. A buyer is bound to be anxious in a situation where the value of her currency is threatened by, say, unstable markets or diminishing foreign exchange rates. Such a buyer's power to negotiate is clearly reduced, which means she is less likely to make the most satisfactory purchase. She may even be driven to panic buying, taking

what may appear to be quite unreasonable risks. This analogy may shed light on why some Thai women marry foreigners of whom they have little knowledge, and in whom they have little trust.

The findings of the study do, in fact, suggest that empowered women may find marriages more satisfactory than those lacking in power. Both Somjai and Nareerat were able to explore their husbands' backgrounds and ensure that their needs would be met before marrying because they were very much in control and had power in mate selection. They both had choices and good positions from which to negotiate. For Witty and Tassana, the romantic love and concerns about getting older made them enter their marriages with less power. Also, Witty and Suda were dissatisfied with their married lives but felt that they had to endure the situation until they were certain that they could survive if they were to get a divorce. The suggestion that power equates with the ability to negotiate needs and results in greater marital satisfaction is definitely an area worthy of further research exploration.

A unique finding of this study was the perceived threat of exploitation reflected by some of the women's fear of being tricked into prostitution. This fear was a common concern of participants with little education and little knowledge of their partners before they got married. Although this issue has not been mentioned elsewhere in the

literature on intermarriage, I believe that it may reflect a common experience of women in poverty. It is an undeniable fact in Thailand, as well as elsewhere around the world, that female exploitation is a social problem. Exploitation of women occurs everyday everywhere. In Thailand, many young girls and women from poor families, mostly from Northern Thailand, are sold by their parents into prostitution. Others are lured or forced to be sex slaves by pimps or gangs (Davy, 1994). However, it should be kept in mind that not all women from poor families have undergone these traumatic circumstances. It would be inaccurate to believe that every poor family sells its daughters into prostitution. Nevertheless, it is a reality for some and well known to most young women in Thai society.

From the point of view of the social exchange theorist, it is not difficult to account for the Thai women's fear of being tricked into prostitution or their fear about whether or not their husbands would prove to be reliable. Any negotiation involving trade is bound to be approached with suspicion, especially if one has little knowledge of the trading partner. Only when trust is developed will suspicion subside. According to the social exchange theorist, trust develops when a relationship conforms to the norm of reciprocity:

> Trust refers to the belief on the part of individuals that their partners will not exploit or take unfair advantage of them in any way. The development of trust is related to the experience of reciprocity and

> fairness. When a relationship conforms to the norm of reciprocity and when the pattern of exchange is perceived of as fair, individuals are more likely to come to believe that they will not be exploited. (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993, p. 404)

Interestingly, the most effective strategy the Thai women used to resolve their fears was to seek financial support from their future husbands. This support was tangible evidence that the relationship would not be exploitative.

Scanzoni's (1972) view of the role of reciprocity and exchange in marriage also apply to the finding that all nine participants in the study adopted traditional marital roles:

> Scanzoni applies the concepts of indebtedness and reciprocity to understanding marital role consensus, marital conflict, and the stability of marriage. Reciprocity operates to stabilize marital relationships by helping to establish a network of independent duties and expectations. In other words, husbands and wives each have certain duties to perform for their spouse and each has certain duties they expect their partner to fulfill. The norm of reciprocity stabilizes these marital relationships in that each must provide the rewards that the other wants if they hope to obtain valued rewards and because each experiences a degree of moral obligation to meet the expectations of the partner due to indebtedness to the partner that is experienced. In other words, patterns of role expectation and obligation become stable within marriages over time since these function to alleviate the experiences of indebtedness and obligation that accompany the norm of reciprocity. (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993, pp. 403-404)

According to Scanzoni (1972), then, the gender roles adopted in a marriage are the result of the bargaining process that goes on within that marriage. Clearly, all the women in the study felt that taking on the duties expected of a traditional wife was a fair bargain.

It is true, however, that some of the participants were dissatisfied with their marriages, and critics of social exchange theory might argue that the theory does not account for the fact that these women were as committed to maintaining the marriage as those who were satisfied. The answer may be that marriage entails such a huge investment of resources that one would do anything to make it continue rather than deal with the cost of leaving the marriage and reinvesting in a new relationship.

Implications for Counselling

The study clearly illustrates the need for counsellors to be knowledgable about Thai and North American cultures when counselling Thai women who are married to Canadian men. They should be able to provide clients with information about how to access various support services. Information about where to find shops catering to particular ethnic groups, where to go for help to integrate with the community and with one's ethnic group, and suggestions about programs to improve language skills or other self-development programs are some of the supports counsellors might provide for clients like the women in the study.

While counsellors must be cautioned to listen carefully to their clients without preconceived notions, they must also have some understanding of their clients' frame of reference. For example, counsellors need to be aware of how

Thai women define "a good husband," what expectations the women hold when marital role conflicts occur, how they view relationships with in-laws, what stages of marriage the women are in, and whether or not they need help to explore their alternatives?

The study also calls for the need for counsellors to be aware of their own ignorance or biases when counselling Thai-Canadian couples or one partner in such a marriage. For example, a woman's fear of being tricked into prostitution may appear to be unreasonable if counsellors are not aware of the Thai social context; and the strategies that the women employed to resolve their fears may seem peculiar to members of the North American society. Specifically, the study reminds counsellors of the notion widely adopted by cross-cultural counsellors that counsellors should be non-judgemental towards cultural differences or in other words, not to assume differences as abnormal or unhealthy (Hsu, 1977; McGoldrick, 1982; McGoldrick, Garcoa-Preto, Hines, & lee, 1989; Pederson, 1985; Sue & Sue, 1990). Furthermore, the study points to the need for counselling "that respects culture and at the same time challenges cultural inequities in gender arrangement" (McGoldrick et al, 1989, p. 169). Counsellors must be aware of their own agenda, such as their urge to help clients move beyond their cultural values.

The study also suggests marriage counsellors be aware of the need to keep balance in their perspectives when

counselling couples from different cultural backgrounds. As Klineberg (1985) suggests, cross-cultural counsellors need to pay full attention to three aspects of their clients: the clients as a human being in general, as a member of a particular culture group, and as a unique individual. Counsellors who ignore the culture issue would surely be ineffective, and so would counsellors who concluded that cultural differences are the root of all the problems in intermarriage. The study clearly points out that conflict in Thai-Canadian marriages can be due to cultural differences, individual differences, or an overlap of both. Counsellors should not underestimate any of these sources of conflict when working with Thai-Canadian couples.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. A study to elaborate on the three developmental stages identified here and to explore the possibility of further stages would be very useful. Furthermore, expanded research can focus on remodification of the diagram originated by this study. Possibly, a diagram could be presented to Thai women involved in Thai-Canadian marriages who reside in other provinces. These women may offer further insights to their experiences based on their social status and physical location in Canada, or their personal and family circumstances. This would serve to build a more fully substantiated theory.

2. A study investigating the trust building process among Thai-Canadian couples during their courtship period and early years of marriage might produce some useful results.

3. A study looking for a correlation between power or the ability to negotiate needs and the level of marital satisfaction could be an interesting and useful project for further exploration.

4. Statistics about the Thai community and the numbers of Thai-Canadian couples in all the provinces of Canada may provide a clear picture of this specific part of the Canadian mosaic.

5. A study focusing on the husbands' perspective will help to provide a complete picture of Thai-Canadian marriages.

6. A comparitive study of Thai-Canadian marrriages in Thailand and Canada would help to identify and to explicate variables within marriage attributable specifically to culture. This would enhance our understanding of relationship formation and marital adjustment in cross-national marriages.

These are a few of the avenues that can lead to new insights into the experiences of those involved in Thai-Canadian cross-national marriages. Given the growing number of such unions in this country, more research into the phenomenon seems well warranted. Admittedly, this

dissertation does not provide answers to all the questions that it has brought forth; and no doubt, many other questions about this subject will arise in the future. The strength of the work, rather, lies in the fact that it breaks new ground and opens the door to further understanding of the complex social dynamics of the Thai-Canadian cross-national marriage.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Informed Consent Form

RESEARCH TITLE: The Experience of Thai women in Thai-Canadian Marriages

RESEARCHER: Orapin Stiramon, Ph.D. Candidate

CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr. B. L. Paulson
Dr. D. D. Sawatzky
Department of Educational Psychology

The purpose of this research project is to explore the phenomenon of cross-national marriages through the experience of Thai women who married Canadian men and reside in Alberta.

There are no direct benefits to the participants of this study, but it is hoped that the information they share will be helpful to other women who might enter intermarriage. An interview will probably last for at least one hour. A second interview may be needed. During the interviews the participants will be asked questions about personal experiences. Interviews will be audiotaped.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT I,_____
HEREBY agree to participate as a volunteer in the above named research study.

I hereby give permission to be interviewed and for the interviews to be tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed into written form using a pseudonym.

I understand that at the completion of the research the tapes will be erased. I understand that the information will be published in the form of a thesis, and may be published in a professional journal. I further understand that every effort will be made to remove all identifying information.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time, without penalty.

_____ _____
Participant's Signature Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

1. Demographic data and General information
   - Where were you born? In what year?
   - What is your highest level of education?
   - What is your present occupation?
   - How long have you been married?
   - Have you been previously married?
   - Do you have any children?
   - Did your husband have an opportunity to know your family? (before or after you marriage)
   - How did your family feel about your marriage?
   - Have you met your husband's family?
   - How well do you know them?

2. Main questions
   - What is it like for you as a Thai married to a Canadian?
   - What experience would you like to share with other about your intercultural marriage?
   - How would you describe your marriage?
   - What makes you stay in the marriage? (What major factors lead to your divorce?)
   - What issues did you need to deal with your married life?
   - Are there any differences between you and your spouse in the area of values? (other possible exploratory areas are: food and drink, sexual compatibility, male-female role, time, place of residence, politics, friends, finances, in-laws, social class, religion, raising children, language and communication, dealing with stress, ethnocentrism)
   - How are the differences settled?
   - When there are differences, how do you deal with them?
   - Who would you turn to when you have a disagreement with your spouse?

3. Attitude
   - How long have you been in Canada?
   - What were your expectations of Canada before coming here?
   - What did you find different from what you expected?
   - What did you find especially pleasant about Canada?
   - What was disappointing?